

# elevate

Levering potentials against shortage of  
skilled workforce for SMEs in Europe

## WP3 INVESTIGATIVE FACTOR AND POTENTIAL RESEARCH REPORT



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## INTRODUCTION

The shortage of skilled workforce in Europe is a growing concern for the region's economic development and is already having an impact on the economic development of Europe. Despite high levels of education, training and expertise, many European countries are experiencing a deficit of skilled workers, particularly in areas such as engineering, information technology, healthcare, and service.



It is making it harder for companies to innovate and grow, as well as leading to higher labour costs, lower productivity, and reduced competitiveness. Moreover, the shortage of skilled workers is exacerbating demographic challenges in many European countries, including an ageing population and declining birth rates. In turn, this is putting additional pressure on social welfare systems, healthcare, and other public services, as there are fewer people of working age to support an increasing number of retirees.

Research as well as ongoing discussions show very clearly that the anchors for solving the problem of shortage of skilled workforces have to aim at the untapped potential (silent reserve) on four distinct levels or pillars which are under the direct control of individual companies. In doing so, we essentially focus our attention in the ELEVATE project on the four 'silent reserves' or untapped potentials in SMEs to address the shortage of skilled workers.

- 1) Part time working or unemployed women
- 2) Workers close to retirement age
- 3) Migration and diversity
- 4) Upskilling the un(low-)skilled

The aim of the ELEVATE project is to provide SME's with concrete support in recruiting potential skilled workers from this pool:

1. Implementation of an Investigative factor and potential research.
2. Development of an online potential scanner for companies to help to evaluate the current situation and potentials.
3. Strategy workshops in SMEs based on innovative curriculums / learning outcomes / training materials.

This Investigative factor and potential research report (1) is the first result of our three steps method. We prepared the methodological background and knowledge basis for the development of the potential scanner (2) and the strategy workshop concept (3).

For further outputs and project results it is crucial and in fact preconditional to establish a well-grounded, reliable, valid and relevant list of indicators to be able to identify the potentials of approaching the problem of shortage of skilled workforce at company level.

Within this first result we organized comprehensive investigative research with companies and experts with the following main objectives:

- Identifying relevant, reliable and valid criteria for the identification of improvement potentials in companies on the 4 defined action levels (women, older workers, diversity and migration, upskilling the low and unskilled).
- Weighting single indicators and potential identifiers against each other's importance in business and company reality.

The partnership has decided to implement a two-step empirical research activity which combines:

- a qualitative methodology (guided interviews) for indicator identification with,
- a quantitative methodology (questionnaire study) for the weighting of indicators and further precision.

For the qualitative research we prepared Interview guidelines to companies about the challenges and obstacles of full-time employment for women, employment for senior workers close to or even after retirement, leveraging potentials of diversity and migration, upskilling the low and unskilled. With the help of these guidelines, all partners held discussions with regional companies, stakeholders and HR experts. The guidelines and the summary of the country-specific interviews can be found in this report.

For the quantitative research we implemented an online questionnaire for companies to further detail the identified potential indicators on the 4 action levels together with weighting of indicators against their relative importance on a business level. The detailed evaluation of the results of these questionnaires and the weighting of indicators are an essential part of this Investigative factor and potential research report.

# 1. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH – PARTNER INTERVIEW RESULTS WITH EXPERTS

## 1.1. Overview

In October 2023, the partnership started working on developing a guideline methodology on which the empirical research was based. (Annex 1: Interview Guideline) All partners used these interview guidelines in the form of a common template as a conversation and orientation guide for their individual expert interviews.

The guidelines were used to interview companies about the challenges and obstacles about full time employment for women, employment for senior workers close to or even after retirement, leveraging potentials of diversity and migration, upskilling the low and unskilled.

### Target groups for Interview:

HR-Experts from Chambers; Employment Agencies; Regional Stakeholder; Policy Makers; Companies

Each partner implemented the interviews with a high degree of flexibility. By the end of the interviews, the key indicators for the four target groups emerged as particularly important. This means that the partners adapted the interview questionnaire into the national language and were supplemented by regional/national specifics in the interviews, with the aim of obtaining as detailed answers as possible from the experts on the four target groups and the challenges / obstacles for SMEs.

It was important for all partners to obtain as much information as possible about the skilled workforce situation and the insights with the four target groups during the qualified country interviews. For this reason, each partner was free to use what they felt was the best method to achieve maximum results.

The implementation was flexibly designed:

- Face to face individual interviews
- Online/call individual interviews
- Focus groups

At the end of the interview phase, each partner summarized all answers from the different interviews in a national interview report, in English, and sent them to the WP3 coordinator IHKPG.

All country interview results were analysed and summarised by the IHKPG. Based on this result report, the entire project consortium discussed and formulated potential indicator questions for the quantitative online survey.

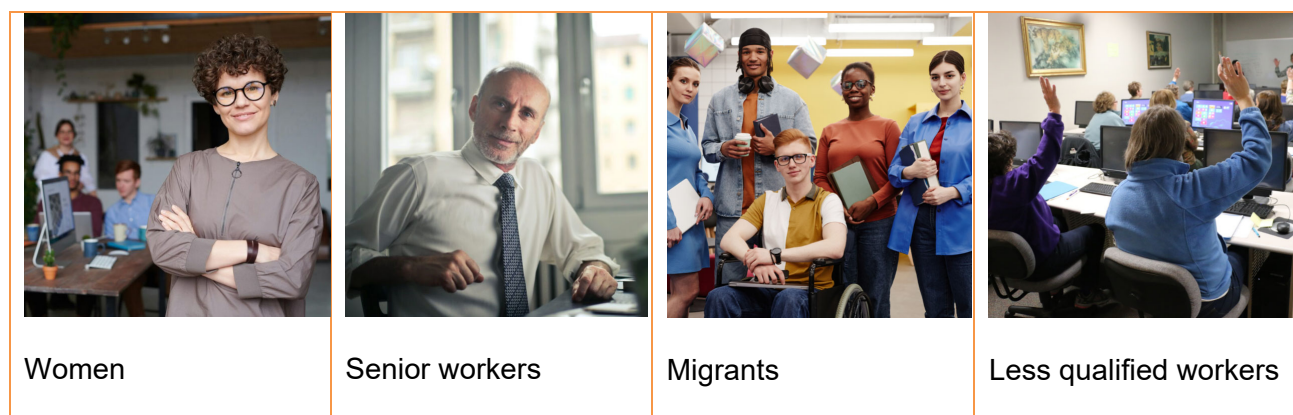
Implementation period: 22.04.2024 – 31.05.2024

## 1.2. Interview Guideline

The main task of this expert interview was to identify relevant indicators that will give us the opportunity to create a professional online questionnaire for SMEs. The Interview guideline contains indicators and potential criteria for all 4 action levels. Starting with the consultation of general or statistical data such as:

- Profile of the interviewed experts (gender, age, company, type of expertise...)
- Statements on the skilled labour situation in the partner countries or sectors
- Information on the real situation in regional/national SMEs and how to deal with this challenge

The main structure of the interview guide was based on the 4 identified target groups:



For each of the 4 target groups a brief statement about the current challenges was described in the beginning and afterwards 3 main questions were formulated, which were answered constructively during the interview by detailed target group specific information, additional questions, and individual discussions.

1. What are the main reasons for the low representation of this group in the labour market, especially as skilled workers?
2. What should SMEs consider, offer or do if they want to increase the proportion of this group in their workforce?
3. What other obstacles beyond the control of SMEs need to be removed in order to increase the employability of this group?

Then during the first half of 2024, 30 guided interviews were conducted across the partner countries Austria, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Slovenia, and Spain.

The results of all individual interviews were summarized by the partners in country-specific National Expert Report Summaries and forwarded to the partner IHKPG, as the leader of this work package. IHKPG formulated an overall summary and shared it with the partners. In constructive discussion rounds, common challenges and relevant, reliable and valid criteria for the identification of improvement potentials in SME's was then formulated with all partners, this was the basis for the quantitative analysis (questionnaire study - for the weighting of indicators and further precision).




### 1.3. Summary of Expert Interviews

In the first half of 2024, a total of 33 regional/national experts were interviewed, which means that our project goal of 30 expert interviews was even exceeded. (ES=6; IT=5; DE=5; SI=5; IRE=6; AT=6;)

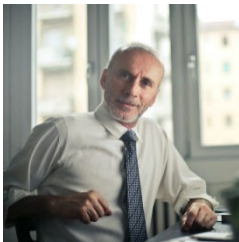
Detailed information on the national expert's profile and their feedback can be found in the country-specific evaluations.

Here you will find a complete overview of all country reports, sorted according to our 4 target groups: "Women-Seniors-Migrants-Low skilled workers" and divided into "Barriers, External Obstacles and Recommendations for SMEs."


	<p><b>WOMEN</b></p> <p>To improve the support for women especially with children or family care obligations to enter the labour market and find conditions that fit their needs and requirements also being able to work full time instead of part time.</p>	
Barriers	External Obstacles	Recommendations for SMEs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unpaid Work and Care Responsibilities: Women disproportionately shoulder domestic and caregiving duties, limiting their full-time employment opportunities.</li> <li>• Lack of affordable and accessible childcare forces many women into part-time or lower-skilled jobs.</li> <li>• Gender stereotypes and traditional roles discourage women from pursuing careers in male-dominated fields.</li> <li>• Many women work part-time due to family responsibilities, impacting their</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost implications: Introducing paid parental leave and improving childcare infrastructure can be expensive for governments and businesses alike.</li> <li>• Employer resistance: Some employers may be reluctant to extend paid parental leave or support childcare infrastructure due to potential disruption and costs.</li> <li>• Political challenges: Changes in tax policy require political will and consensus</li> <li>• Deep-rooted stereotypes: Cultural and societal norms regarding gender roles are deeply ingrained</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible Work Arrangements: Implement flexible working hours, remote work options, and part-time roles.</li> <li>• Provide or subsidize childcare services to enable full-time employment for women.</li> <li>• Create policies supporting parental leave and family-friendly work environments.</li> <li>• Establish mentoring programs and career development opportunities targeted at women.</li> <li>• Promote a diverse and inclusive work environment with clear diversity and inclusion strategies.</li> <li>• Set clear and measurable targets to increase the</li> </ul>



<p>career progression and financial security.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discrimination in recruitment and promotion hinders the career advancement of women.</li> </ul>	<p>and can be resistant to change.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of awareness: Many people are unaware of the impact of stereotypes on gender equality, making it difficult to address them effectively.</li> <li>• Resistance to change: Resistance from conservative or traditionalist groups that perpetuate existing gender norms and stereotypes.</li> <li>• Legal barriers: Existing laws may not adequately protect women from discrimination or provide sufficient support for work-life balance.</li> <li>• Enforcement challenges: Even when supportive laws exist, enforcement and compliance can be inconsistent.</li> </ul>	<p>representation of women at all levels of the company and regularly monitor progress towards these targets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote and make visible female role models within the organization, which can inspire and motivate more women to join and develop within the company.</li> </ul>
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	<p><b>SENIORS</b></p> <p>Supporting older skilled workers close to retirement age to extend their time on the labour market or in a company with conditions that make this possible and fit to their individual needs, health situation, leisure and retirement wishes.</p>	
Barriers	External Obstacles	Recommendations for SMEs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ageism and Stereotypes</li> <li>• Technological and Skills Gaps</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legislative and Regulatory Constraints</li> <li>• Age Discrimination and Stereotypes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offering Flexible Work Arrangements</li> <li>• Investing in Skills Development and Training</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited Training and Development Opportunities</li> <li>• Health and Physical Limitations</li> <li>• Lack of Flexible Work Arrangements</li> <li>• Financial Incentives for Early Retirement</li> <li>• Perceived Cost of Hiring Older Workers</li> <li>• Limited Access to Finance and Capital for SMEs</li> <li>• Regulatory and Legislative Constraints</li> <li>• Cultural and Social Norms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited Access to Training and Development Programs</li> <li>• Healthcare and Social Safety Nets</li> <li>• Financial Incentives for Early Retirement</li> <li>• Technological Advancements and Digitalization</li> <li>• Cultural Norms and Ageist Beliefs</li> <li>• Limited Access to Finance and Capital</li> <li>• Economic Factors and Market Trends</li> <li>• Infrastructure and Accessibility Issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementing Age-Inclusive Recruitment Practices</li> <li>• Promoting Health and Well-being Initiatives</li> <li>• Facilitating Intergenerational Collaboration</li> <li>• Creating Age-Diverse Leadership</li> <li>• Redesigning Job Roles</li> <li>• Offering Partial Retirement Options</li> <li>• Promoting Inclusive Work Culture</li> <li>• Ensuring Access to Training and Development</li> <li>• Offer a service to help seniors with their dependents. Part of this cost could be paid by the SME.</li> </ul>
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			<p><b>MIGRANTS</b></p> <p>Active management of diversity in a company and establishing conditions in a company, in which workers with migration background are able to work and contribute to welfare and growth.</p>
<b>Barriers</b>	<b>External Obstacles</b>	<b>Recommendations for SMEs</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language and Cultural Barriers: Migrants often encounter difficulties due to language barriers and unfamiliarity with local work practices, hindering effective communication and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bureaucratic inefficiencies hinder progress</li> <li>• Legal and policy frameworks</li> <li>• social integration and discrimination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversity and Inclusion Policies: Implement clear policies that promote diversity and inclusion, fostering an environment where migrants feel valued and supported.</li> </ul>	

<p>integration into the workforce.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Recognition of Foreign Qualifications: Complex procedures for validating foreign qualifications and work experience contribute to underemployment and prevent migrants from utilizing their full skillset in the job market.</li> <li>● Discrimination and Prejudice: Discriminatory hiring practices based on ethnicity, nationality, or migrant status, coupled with stereotypes about migrants' abilities, create barriers to career advancement and access to higher-skilled employment opportunities.</li> <li>● Integration Challenges: Limited integration efforts and societal prejudices hinder migrants' ability to adapt to workplace culture and societal norms, further exacerbating their labour market outcomes.</li> <li>● Limited Access to Finance and Capital for SMEs</li> <li>● Regulatory and Legislative Constraints</li> <li>● Cultural and Social Norms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● affordable housing and transportation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Language Training and Cultural Sensitivity: Offer language training programs and cultural sensitivity workshops to facilitate migrants' integration into the workforce.</li> <li>● Recognition of Foreign Qualifications: Advocate for streamlined processes for recognizing and validating foreign credentials to ensure migrants' skills are utilized effectively.</li> <li>● Job Matching and Skill Assessment: Conduct thorough assessments to match migrants' qualifications with available job positions, considering transferable skills and experiences.</li> <li>● Flexible Work Arrangements: Provide flexible work options to accommodate migrants' needs, such as part-time or remote work opportunities.</li> <li>● Networking and Mentorship Programs: Facilitate networking events and mentorship programs to support migrants' professional development and integration into the workplace</li> </ul>
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These qualitative interviews provided us with the basis indicators for formulating our online questionnaire for the quantitative online survey among > 180 regional SMEs in all partner countries.

## 1.4. Quantitative methodology for the weighting of indicators and further precision.

For the quantitative research we implemented an online questionnaire for companies to further detail the identified potential indicators on the four action levels together with weighting of indicators against their relative importance on business level.

An important basis for the preparation of this online survey, which was aimed at a quantitatively high number of companies in the partner countries (total > 180 companies), was the result of the previously conducted expert interviews.

The detailed evaluation of the results of these questionnaires and the weighting of indicators are an essential part of this Investigative factor and potential research report.



## 2. ELEVATE ONLINE-QUESTIONNAIRE

Remember! The main objective in this investigative factor and potential research was to

- Identify relevant, reliable and valid criteria for the identification of **improvement potentials in companies** on the **4 action levels (women, older workers, diversity and migration, upskilling the low and unskilled)**
- Weighting of single indicators and potential identifiers against each other's importance in business reality.

These goals also formed the framework for the development of the questions in the ELEVATE online survey.

The questionnaire was created in the EN version in Google form, then translated into their native language by the partners. Finally, the online questionnaire was available in the languages English, German, Italian, Slovenian and Spanish. In a wide-ranging information campaign, the survey was disseminated in the partner countries, with the result that more than 180 companies participated.

The questionnaire (see attachment) was created based on the challenges, obstacles and indicators identified in our expert interviews. The questionnaire was divided into a total of 6 thematic blocks:

### Introduction

1. Statistic data
2. General indicators for the shortage of skilled labour
3. Indicators with special relevance to female workers
4. Indicators with special relevance to senior workers
5. Indicators with special relevance to migrant workers
6. Indicators with special relevance to low-skilled workers

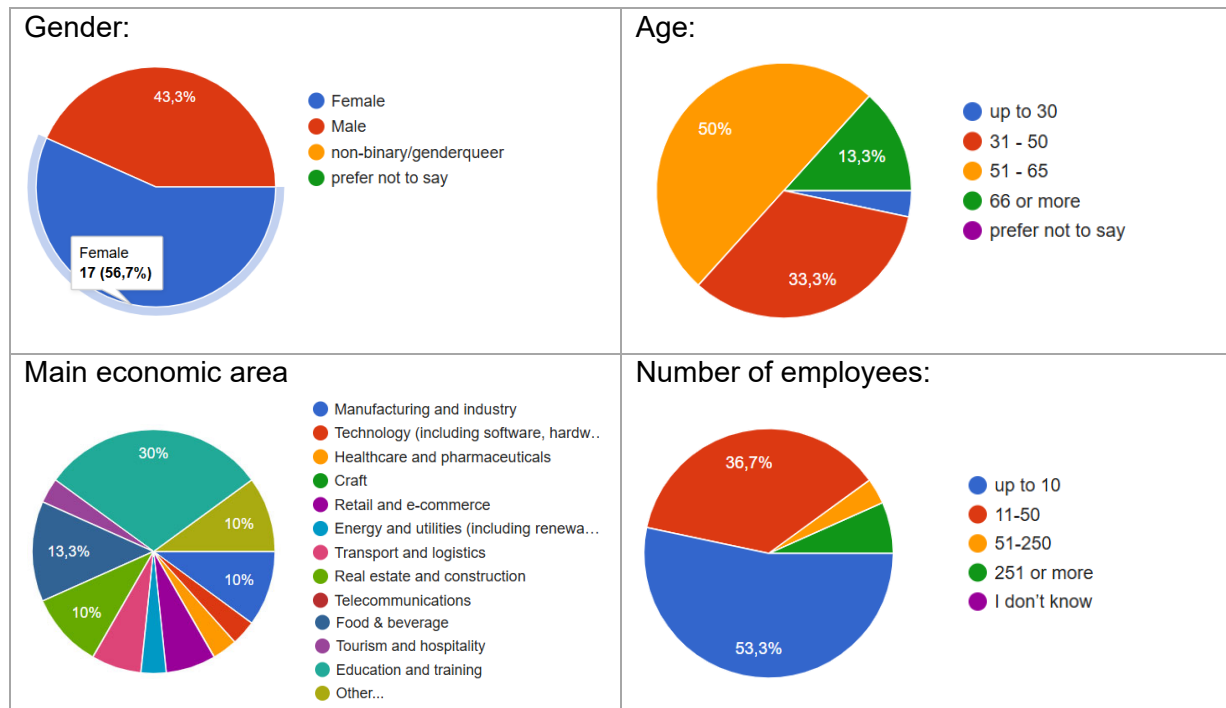
In the next chapters, the results from the individual partner countries will be presented and an extra chapter will be followed by the summary and weighting of single indicators and potential identifiers against each other's importance in business reality.

## 2.1. Quantitative Analysis IRELAND



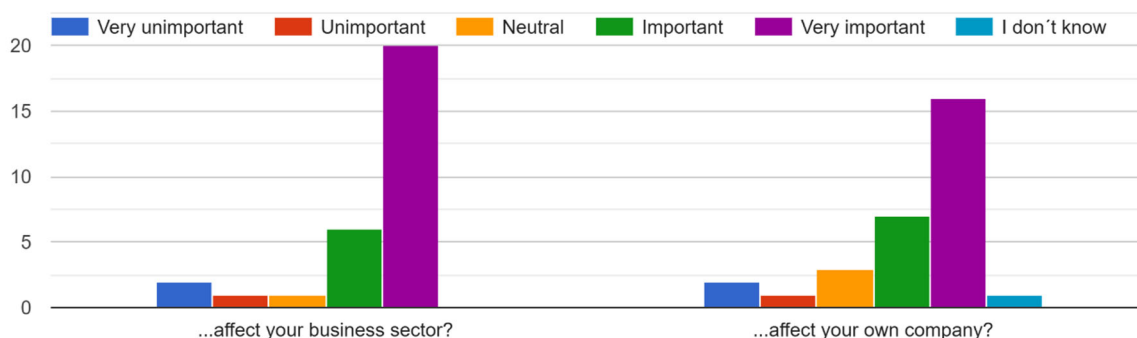
### 2.1.1. Statistic data (IRE)

A total of 30 companies took part in the IRE survey (53,3 % SME; 30% Manufacturing)



The next question was directly related to the current shortage of skilled workers in the respective economic sector and specifically related to each individual company.

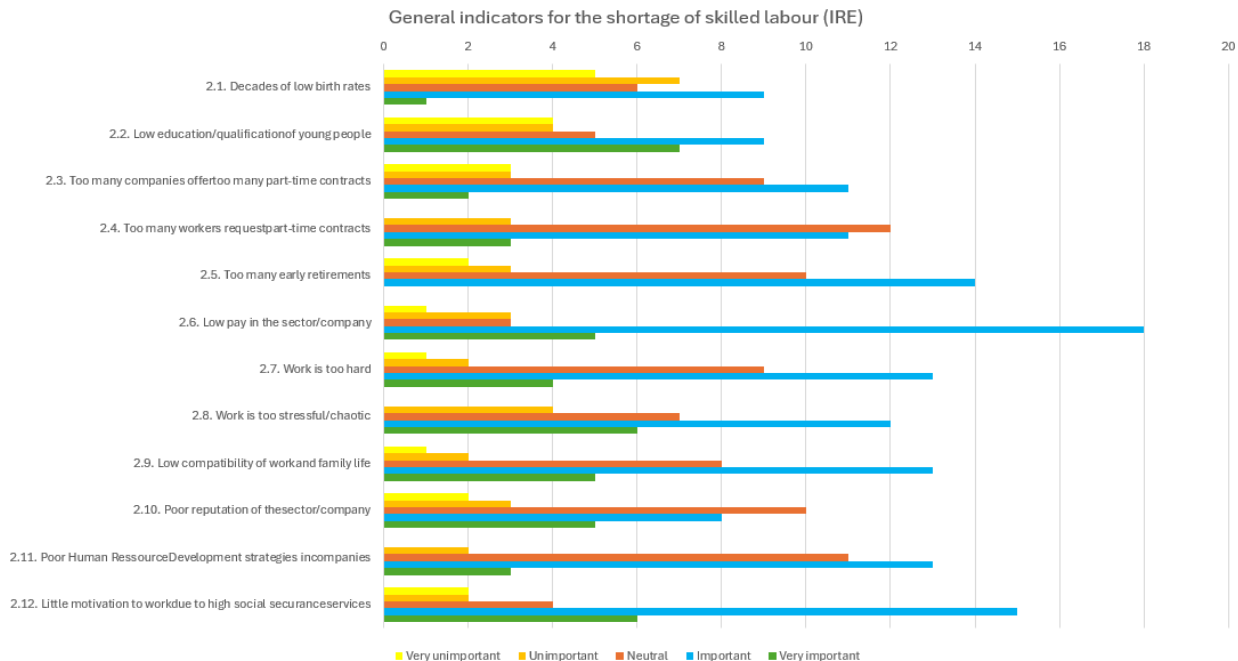
#### 1.6. To what extent does the shortage of skilled workers ...



...20 out of 30 companies answered that the shortage of skilled workers has a very important impact on both the business sector and their own company (16). For this reason, there is an urgent need for action. This general country challenge was also confirmed in the previous expert interviews in Ireland.



### 2.1.2. General indicators for the shortage of skilled labour (IRE)



All of the Irish experts agreed that there is a major shortage of skilled workers across a range of sectors in Ireland for various reasons, including

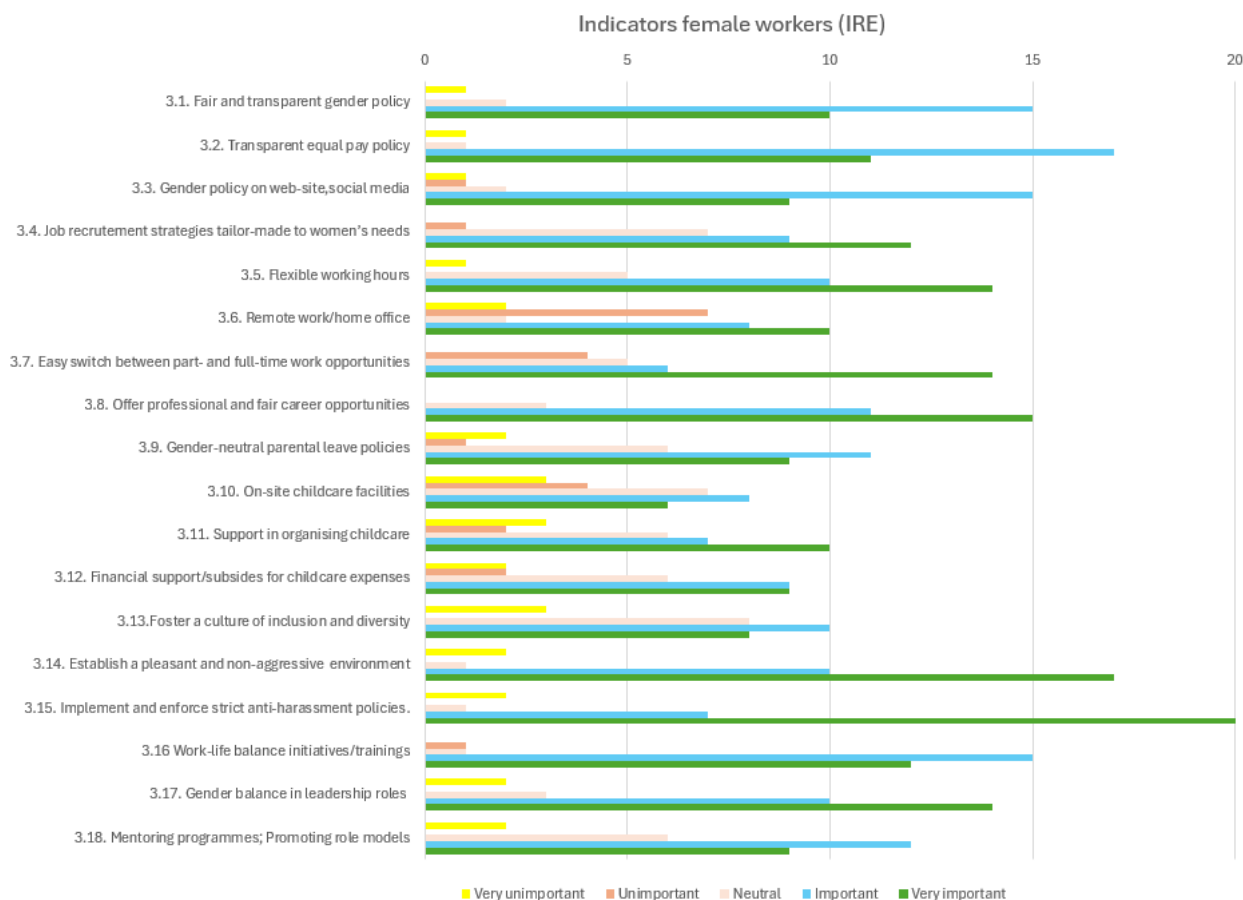
- Very poor wages that don't meet the cost of living in Ireland which is leading to our skilled workers immigrating.
- Mass migration of our workforce to other countries as it is very difficult to build a life here in Ireland due to the housing crisis and the cost of living. Our healthcare system is very stretched, and it is hard to find a GP or dentist that will take you on as a patient.
- Our social welfare system is generous and attractive and there are people that have a house paid for and a weekly income from jobseekers' payment that have no desire to work or upskill.
- The minimum wage and zero hours contracts have become a major problem in Ireland at present.
- The cost-of-living crisis has impacted small businesses across Ireland and rising welfare payments are discouraging a small number of people from upskilling and entering the workforce.

Interestingly, the low pay and the motivation to work in the industry, which are closely linked, become highly significant. However, this factor can be directly influenced by a company's focus on profitability.

P.S: The answer I don't know was not taken into account in the evaluation!

After the general indicators, we will take a closer look at our 4 identified target groups, as a possible future potential for securing skilled workers.

### 2.1.3. Indicators female workers (IRE)

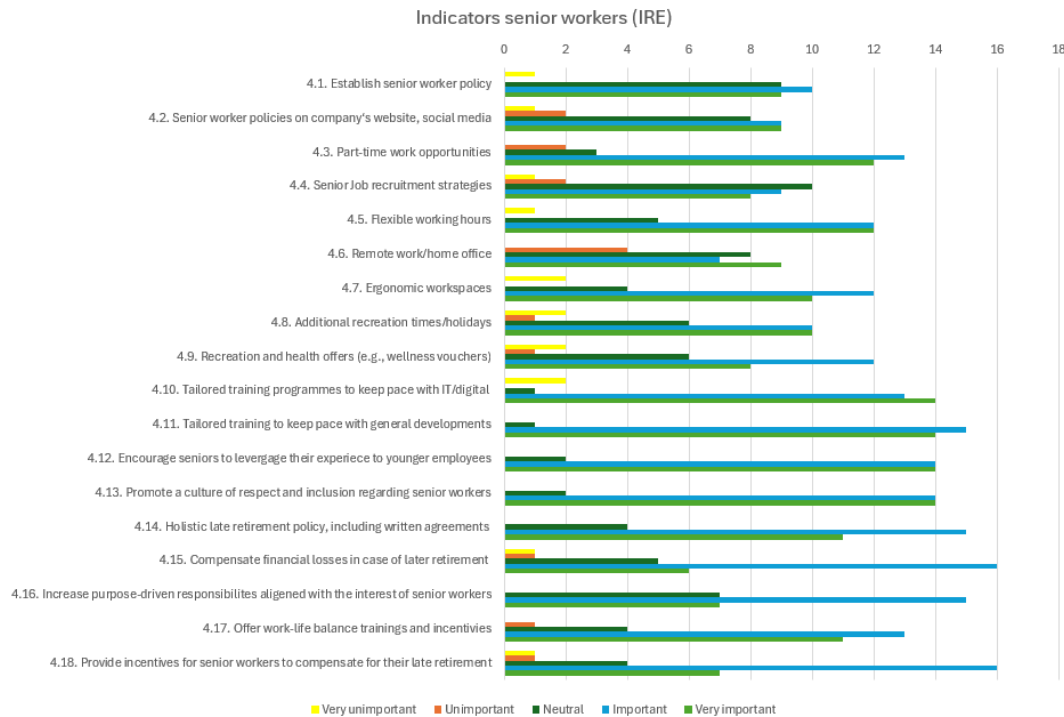


In addition to equal pay and flexible working time models, corporate policy/culture and equal career opportunities play an important or very important role for the female workforce. During the expert interviews, the following challenge was described, among others:

‘Childcare supports and the old tradition of men being the higher earners. If a child is sick, the mother generally stays home to mind the child as they are generally the lowest paid in the household. One parent family are mostly claimed by women, and they may have limited support, childcare and working options to suit children's school time. There are very few job opportunities to support one parent families that allow them to work and bring children to school etc, which leads them to taking up lower paid jobs and not upskilling due to family commitment’.

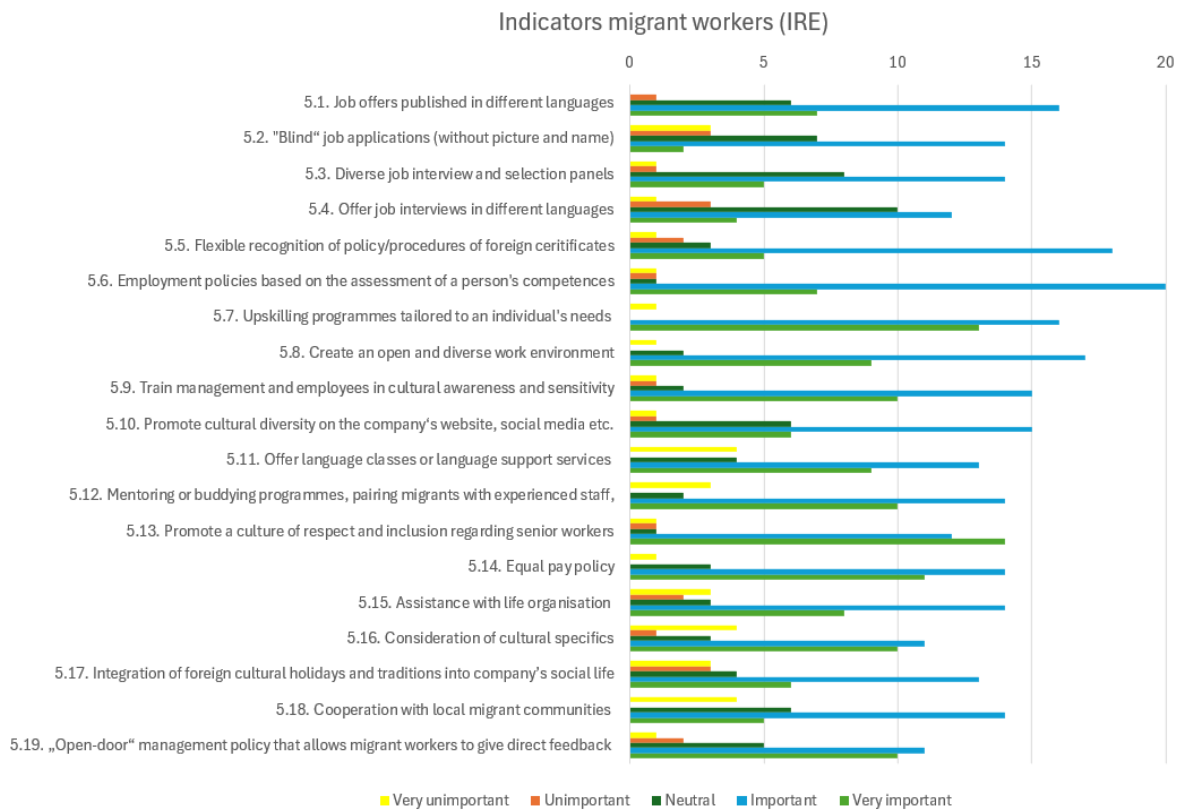
‘The patriarchal society that we live in leaves women doing most if not all the free labour at home. Also due to the patriarchal society we live in, we do not value women the way we value men. It is estimated that if a woman was paid for all the work she does in the home and for children, it would amount to roughly €200,00 per year. Women are working, we just don't acknowledge it or pay them for it. If we want them to work outside of the home, we have to put measures in place to ensure that the work inside the home is taken care of.’

## 2.1.4. Indicators senior workers (IRE)

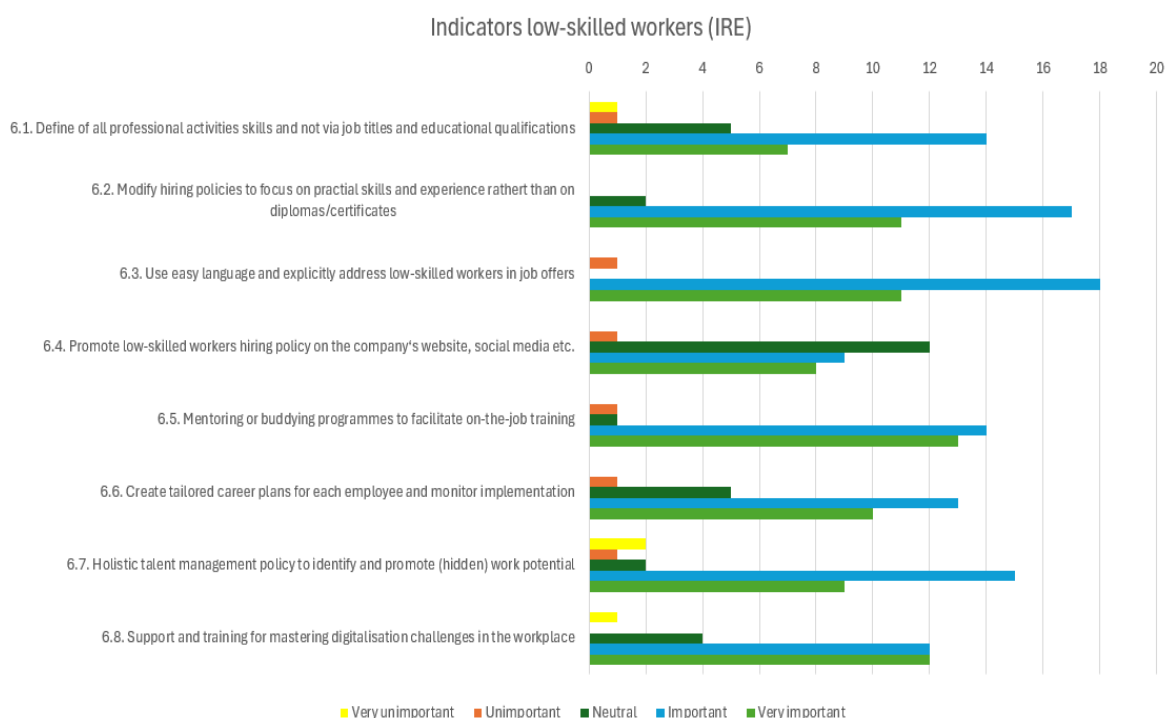


For senior workers, topics such as vocational training (upskilling / reskilling) are at the top of the list, especially when it comes to digitalization, green & sustainable workplaces. In order to keep older skilled workers in the company for longer, internal incentives must be created.

## 2.1.5. Indicators migrant workers (IRE)



## 2.1.6. Indicators low-skilled workers (IRE)



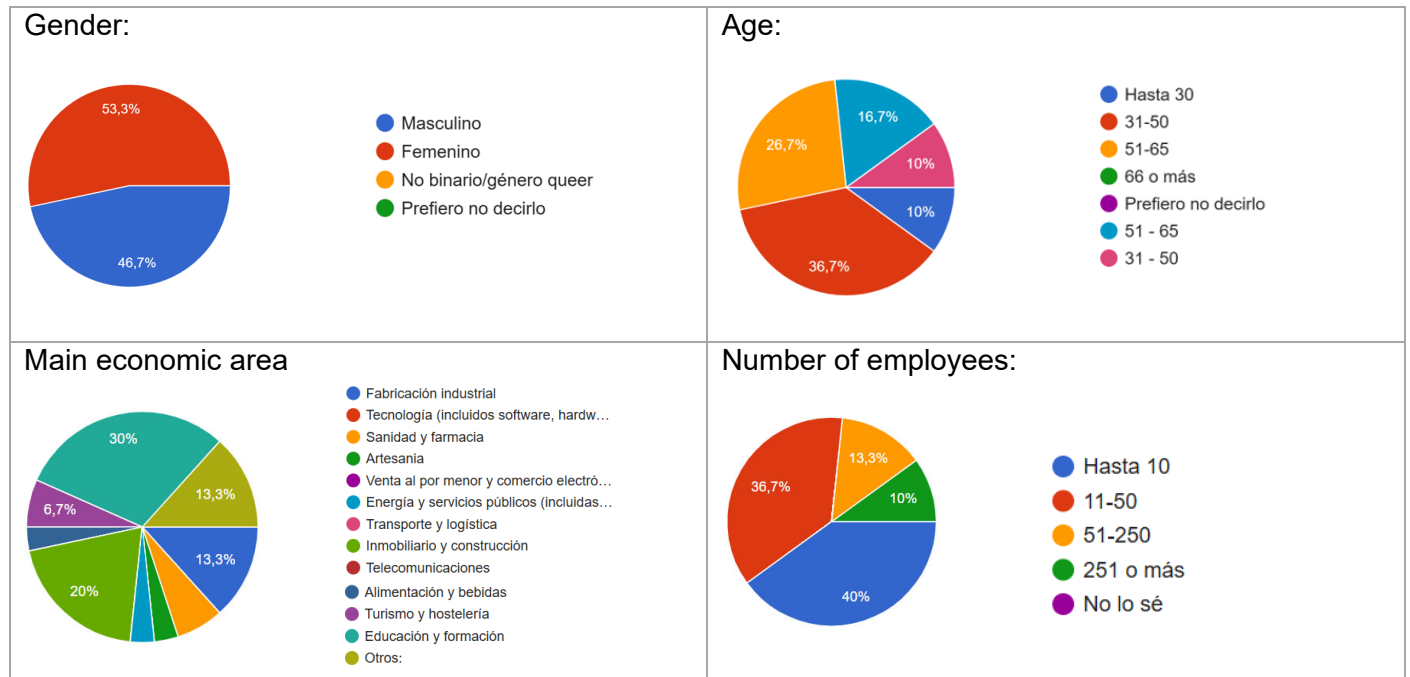
Increasingly, tasks of low-skilled employees are being replaced by automation and digitalization. This transformation should be used to make low-skilled employees fit for skilled jobs in order to keep them as skilled workers. Topics such as mentoring programs, talent management and on-the job training are on the to-do list. At the latest since the change to outcome orientation at the workplace and in vocational training, the importance has been on Knowledge-Skills-Competences. Even if formally obtained certificates are still considered to be of great importance as proof of professional qualification, entrepreneurs should give formally low-skilled people in particular a chance to prove their skills in the workplace, regardless of the certificate. (this is especially interesting for migrants without formal recognition).

## 2.2. Quantitative Analysis SPAIN

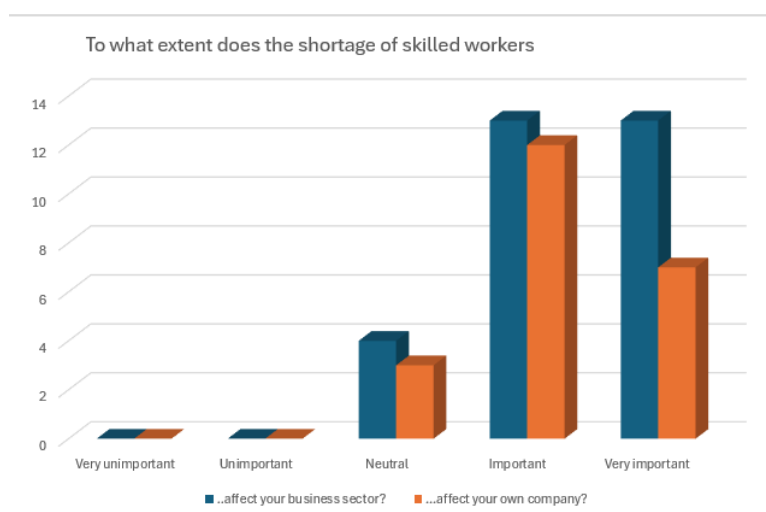


### 2.2.1. Statistic data (ES)

A total of 30 companies took part in the ES survey...



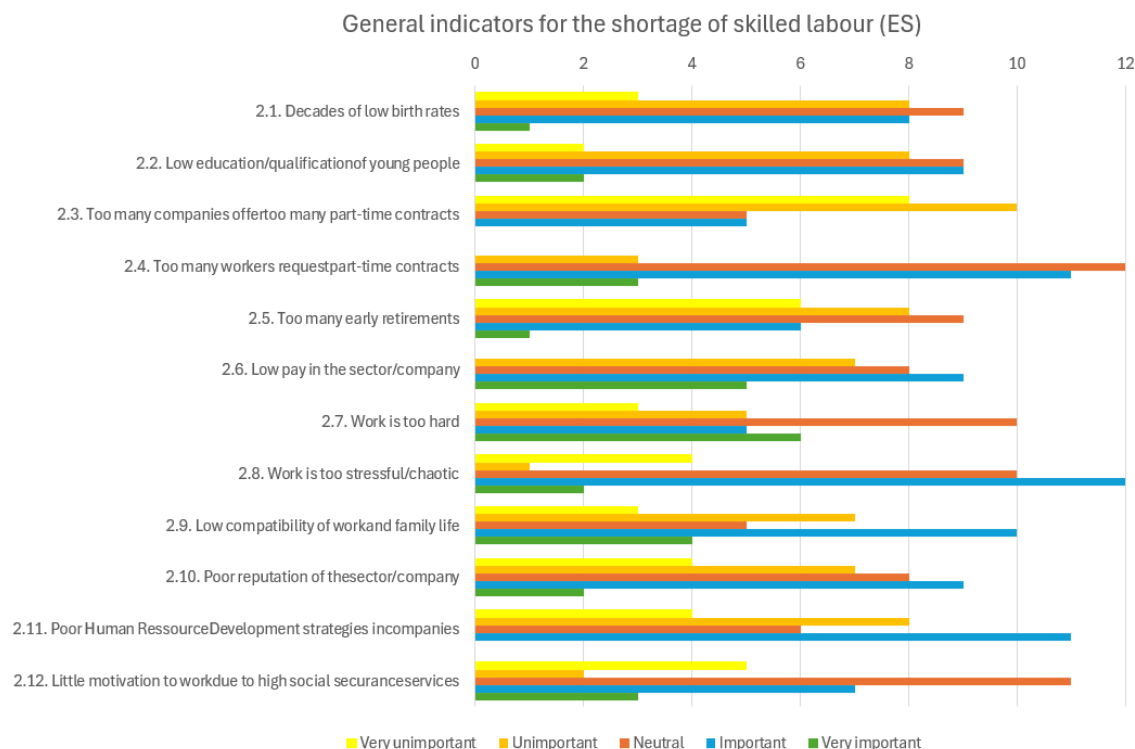
Our next question was directly related to the current shortage of skilled workers in the respective economic sector and specifically related to one's own company.



...13 out of 30 companies answered that the shortage of skilled workers has a very important effect, impact on both the business sector and their own company (7).



## 2.2.2. General indicators for the shortage of skilled labour (ES)



Stress in the work place, lack of work-life balance and poor HR management are at the top of the general indicators. Consensus on the shortage of skilled as well as unskilled labour. This shortage of skilled labour is becoming a real problem for the growth and sustainability of business activity. Companies could have a higher level of recruitment, but this cannot be achieved due to the lack of qualified personnel.

On the one hand, this is a problem in terms of the company's own activity (lack of personnel) and also has an inflationary effect on salaries, given the shortage of supply of these professional profiles, which in turn affects the company's competitiveness, limits the ability of companies to grow and compete, affecting productivity and innovation.

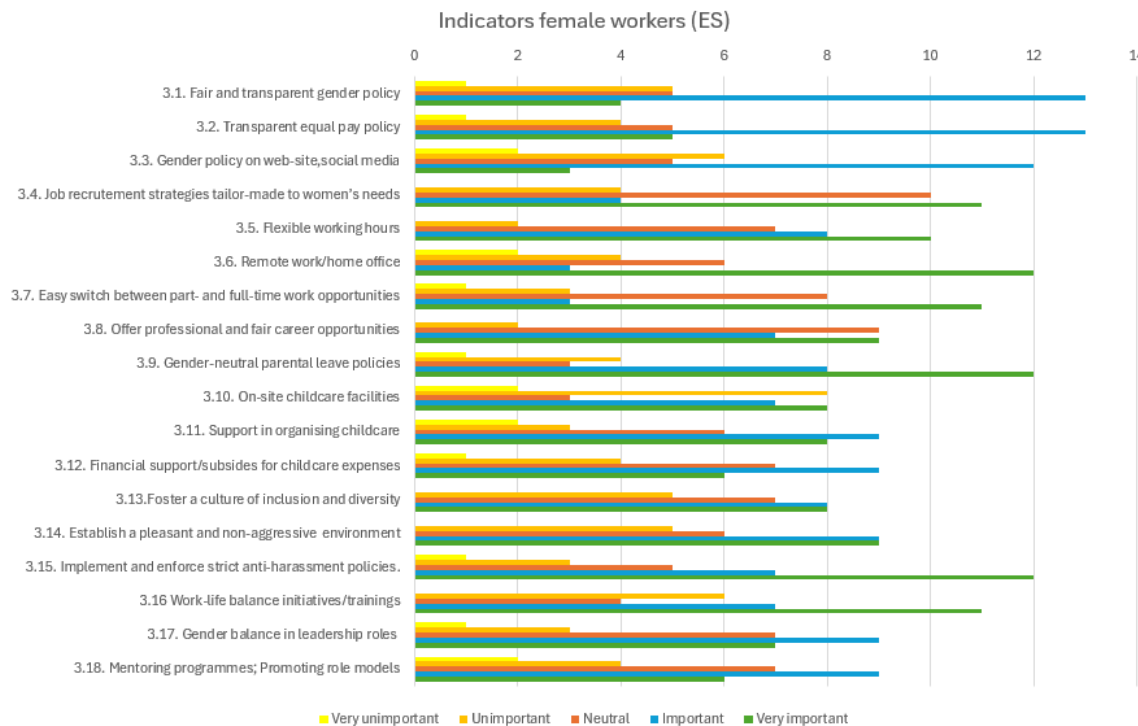
Politically, the situation calls for effective responses in terms of education and vocational training policies. Reforms are needed to better align education with market demands, as well as continuous training programmes to upgrade workers' skills.

Fundamental reasons:

1. **Demographic pyramid:** lack of generational replacement.
2. **Mismatch** between what is in demand (more technological and scientific) and people's qualifications: gap between the education system and the needs of the labour market
3. **Talent drains** due to lack of incentives to retain and attract talent, such as competitive working conditions and growth opportunities, aggravates this situation.
4. The **informal economy** in certain sectors does not encourage people to enter the labour market.

5. Excessive coverage of **social services** which discourages people from entering the labour market.
6. **Lack of attractiveness of vocational training**, although it is becoming more and more socially relevant.

### 2.2.3. Indicators female workers (ES)



Women have higher unemployment rates, with and without qualifications. We live in an unequal society. It is a structural problem. The under-representation of women in the skilled labour market in Spain is largely due to **cultural factors and gender stereotypes**. From an early age, girls are often discouraged (by family, patriarchal culture) from pursuing careers in male-dominated areas such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

The majority of women in Spain opt for care, social and educational training (health, social care, education ....), areas and sectors related to the private space where they have developed their activity within the family, feminised sectors that are much less revalued.

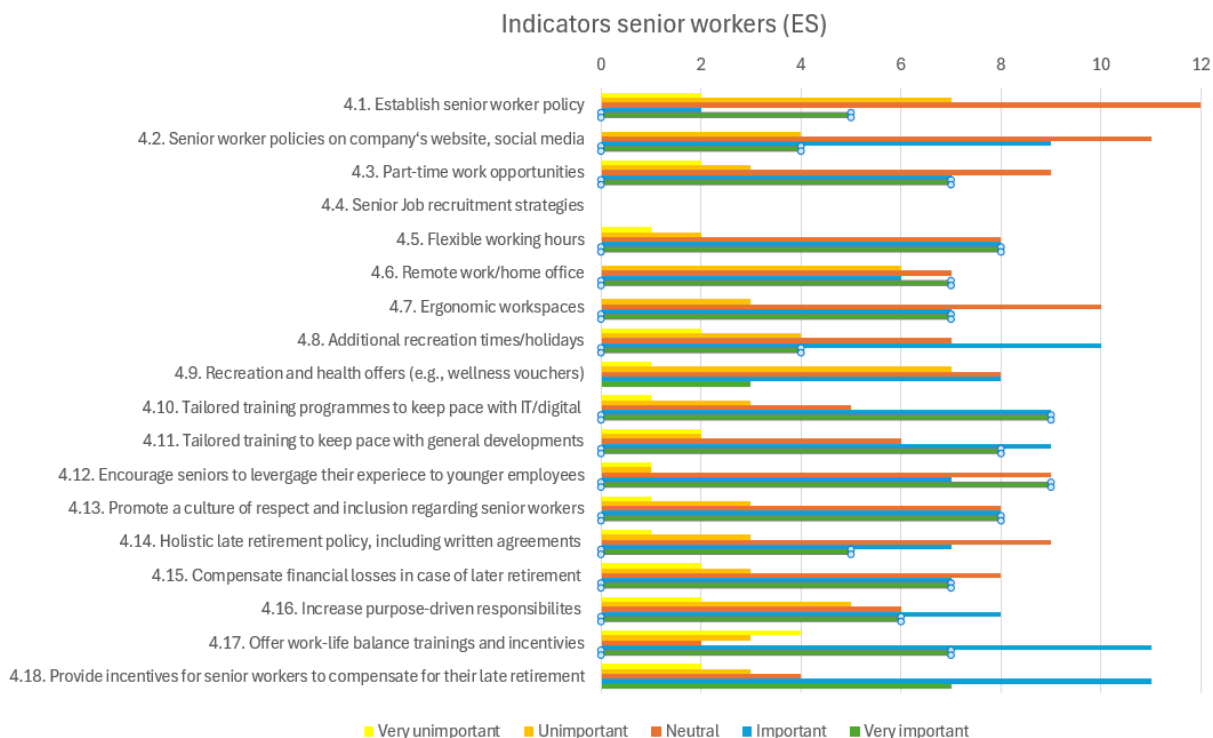
Progressively, this is changing, fortunately. But change is slow. Women should study other more scientific and technical careers so that they can access these jobs.

Another significant factor is the **structure of the labour market and work-family reconciliation policies**. Women often face greater difficulties in balancing work and family responsibilities due to the insufficient availability of childcare services and the persistence of social norms that assign women the lion's share of domestic and care work. This situation may lead many women to opt for

part-time or lower-skilled jobs that offer greater flexibility but fewer career development opportunities and lower pay. This is not a business **reason**, but a **social** one. In addition, barriers to career advancement, known as the 'glass ceiling', and gender discrimination in the workplace also limit women's opportunities to attain skilled and leadership roles.

- **Prejudices, stereotypes...** Although they are usually the ones who get the best grades, many companies prefer to hire men: **SEXISM**.
- **Lack of role models** the lack of female role models in leadership positions and in qualified sectors contributes to the perpetuation of these disparities. This is slowly evolving. In a few years it will improve.
- **Lack of diversity.** There is a need to improve diversity in companies.
- Lack of awareness.

## 2.2.4. Indicators senior workers (ES)



The under-representation of senior workers in the labour market, especially in skilled roles, can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, there are age-related **prejudices** and **stereotypes** that may influence hiring and promotion decisions: **AGEISM**. Many companies may perceive older workers as less adaptable to change, less productive or less able to learn new skills, which can lead to discrimination in the selection process.

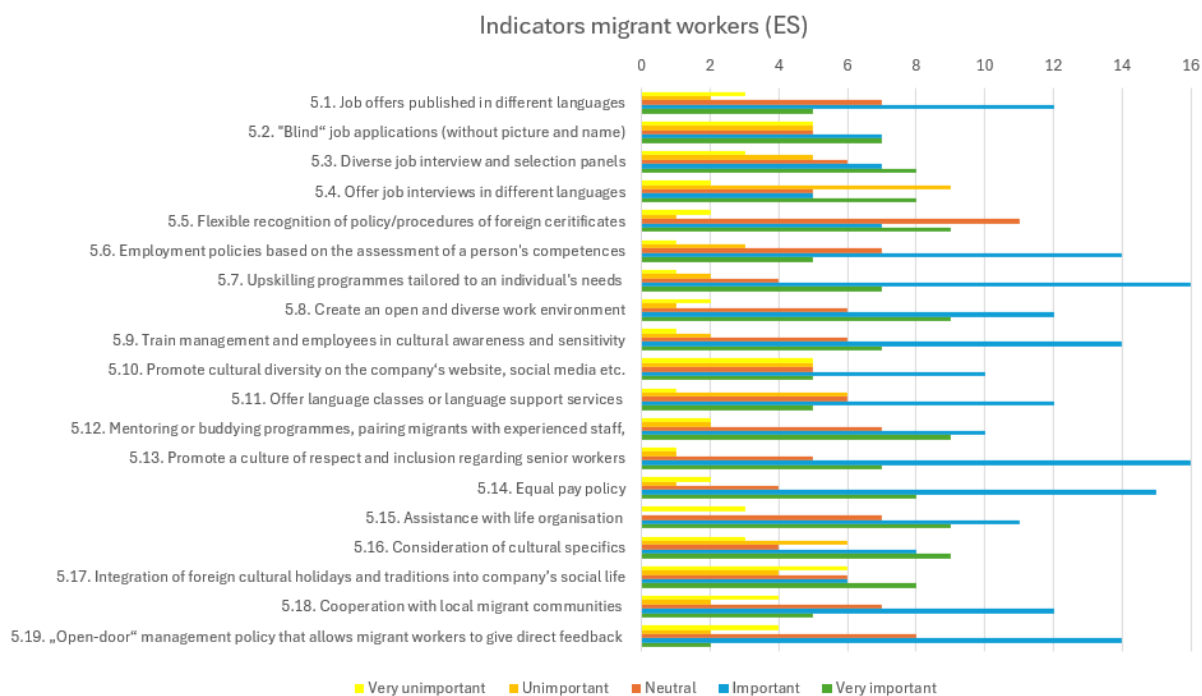
SMEs believe that an older worker costs more than a younger one. Paradox: They talk about retaining talent and at the same time do without people in their 50s and 55s because of cost issues. They are committed to recruiting younger people who are cheaper and who are expected to have

better skills to adapt to the technological advances that new tools such as artificial intelligence offer. But in this way, they lose a lot of knowledge.

In addition, seniors may also face **challenges** related to **technology and skills upgrading**. With the rapid evolution of technology in the workplace, those who are not familiar with the latest tools and systems may face difficulties competing in the labour market. In addition, older people often face barriers to accessing training and professional development opportunities that would allow them to keep up with the changing demands of the labour market.

One respondent considers that the senior profile is indeed represented among skilled workers, except in technological or other more digitalised sectors. If a company needs a qualified profile, it will hire regardless of age. The possible lack of agility, etc., of a senior, is compensated for by experience and know-how.

### 2.2.5. Indicators migrant workers (ES)



**Linguistic and cultural barriers** that hinder the labour integration of migrants in a new country. Lack of fluency in the local language and unfamiliarity with work rules and practices can limit employment opportunities, especially in roles that require effective communication and teamwork.

**Bureaucratic procedures and barriers:** It is common for migrants to face obstacles in the recognition of their credentials and work experience. In Spain it takes about 2 years to recognise foreign qualifications. Differences in education and certification systems between countries can make it difficult to validate qualifications and skills acquired abroad, which can limit employment opportunities in skilled roles.

In addition, **discrimination and prejudice** can play a role in the under-representation of migrants in the labour market, with employers who may prefer candidates who are natives or have local surnames over migrants, regardless of their skills and qualifications. If they are older and female.... Discrimination is further exacerbated by SMEs.

**Skills mismatch with the skills demanded** by companies. This is more accentuated in this group than in the local population.

### 2.2.6. Indicators low-skilled workers (ES)



Many Spanish companies have moved their operations to countries where labour costs are lower, which has led to the loss of low-skilled jobs. However, there are still jobs for low-skilled people, in construction, forestry and gardening, hospitality and catering... This demographic (mostly young migrants) work in jobs that Spaniards do not want because of their harshness, such as in the forges, where North Africans are employed. (policy)

**The increasing demand for specialised and technical skills** in the modern economy has led employers to prefer to hire workers with specific education and training, leaving low-skilled workers at a disadvantage in the labour market.

The biggest handicap for this group is the **legal issues** (migrants); they can be given training but then they cannot be hired because they do not have administrative papers in order. The situation is absurd.

The lack of security and stability, the fact of knowing that no matter what is done there will be no growth, the very poor working conditions offered, etc. It is a group with an uncertain future due to the few facilities available to this profile of worker.

**Gender:**

Gender	Percentage
Weiblich	47%
Männlich	53%
Nicht-binär/Genderqueer	0%
Möchte ich nicht angeben	0%

**Age:**

Age Group	Percentage
bis 30	7,6%
31 - 50	62,1%
51 - 65	28,8%
66 und älter	0%
Möchte ich nicht angeben	0%

**Main economic area:**

Economic Area	Percentage
Herstellung und Industrie	12,1%
Technologie (einschließlich Software,...)	12,1%
Gesundheitswesen und Pharma	9,1%
Handwerk	12,1%
Einzelhandel und E-Commerce	15,2%
Energie und Versorgungsunternehmen...	25,8%
Transport und Logistik	12,1%
Immobilien und Bauwesen	12,1%
Telekommunikation	12,1%
Lebensmittel	12,1%
Tourismus und Gastgewerbe	12,1%
Bildung und Ausbildung	12,1%
Andere	12,1%

**Number of employees:**

Employee Count	Percentage
bis zu 10	24,2%
11-50	50%
51-250	21,2%
251 und mehr	0%
Ich weiß es nicht	0%

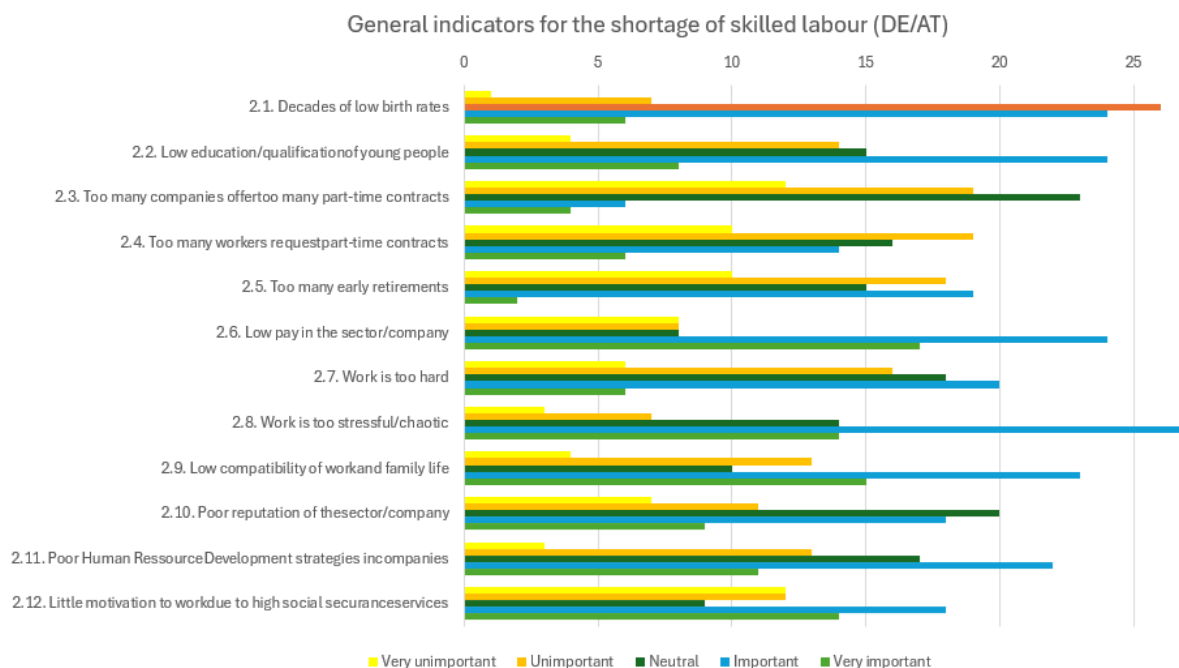
The bar chart displays the frequency of responses for two categories: '...Ihren Geschäftsbereich?' and '...Ihr eigenes Unternehmen?'. The y-axis represents the count, ranging from 0 to 30. The x-axis lists the response categories: 'Überhaupt nicht' (blue), 'Gering' (red), 'Neutral' (orange), 'Stark' (green), 'Sehr stark' (purple), and 'Ich weiß es nicht' (light blue). The 'Ich weiß es nicht' category has a value of 0 for both categories.

Kategorie	...Ihren Geschäftsbereich?	...Ihr eigenes Unternehmen?
Überhaupt nicht	3	4
Gering	11	14
Neutral	7	10
Stark	32	26
Sehr stark	13	12
Ich weiß es nicht	0	0

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### 2.3.2. General indicators for the shortage of skilled labour (DE/AT)



There is clear statistical evidence for a considerable shortage of skilled workforce in Austria. At the moment about 83% of companies report problems and challenges to find suitable skilled workers for open and new jobs, whereas 27% report even very huge problems. Shortage of a skilled workforce is a day-to-day topic in politics and different strategies (short, medium and long term) are currently discussed. Raising the existing employment potential together with migration of skilled workforce are the most obvious strategies.

Different reasons may be found, low salary, bad working conditions, fast economic development of a sector (such as all green jobs, especially professions in the field of photovoltaic panels etc.) which cannot be covered with skilled workers that fast, effects of the corona pandemic which has made many workers change their job due to the risk of pandemic influence etc.

As in all western industrialised countries, the main reason is that there are simply too few people on the labour market, which is mainly due to negative birth rates over several decades. In addition, immigrants are not trained quickly enough and sufficiently well for the labour market and there are unfavourable labour market conditions (early retirement, little social support for families and working women).

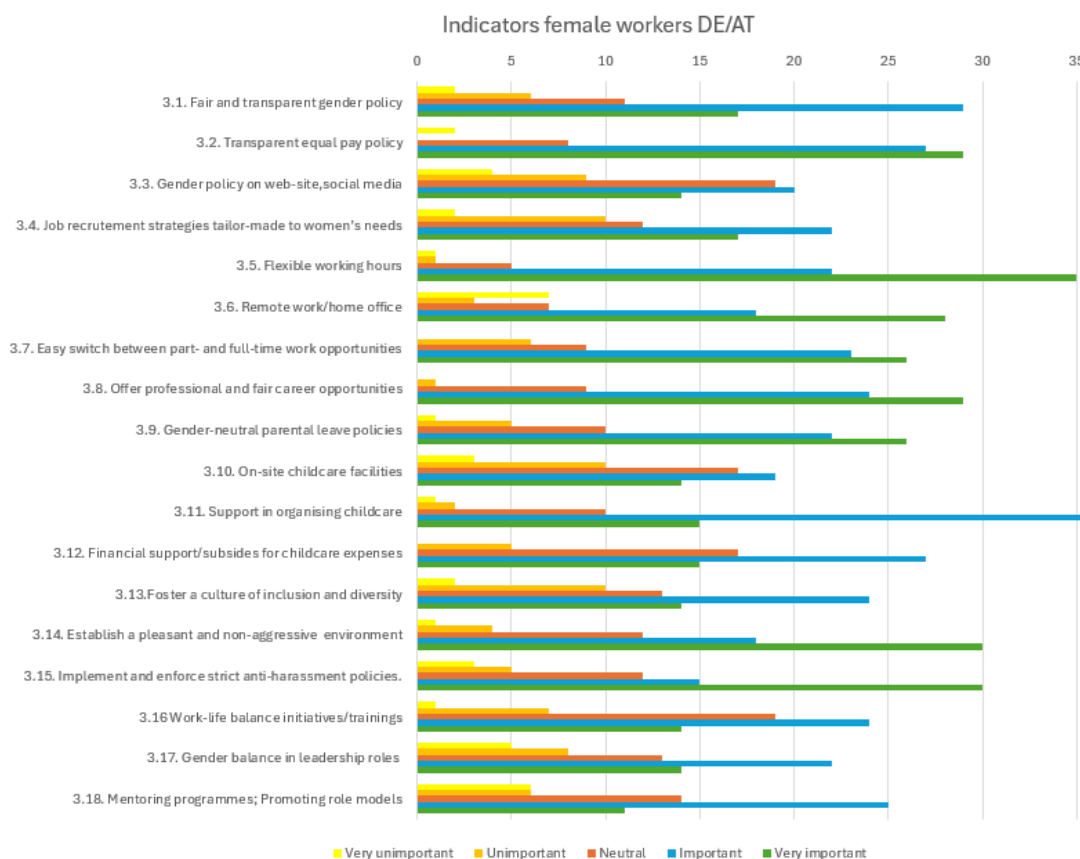
In Germany, the shortage of skilled workers is an ongoing issue that is the subject of much discussion in both the business world and in everyday politics. As in other parts of Germany, the shortage of skilled labour is also a significant and challenging issue in Brandenburg.

Indeed, the shortage of skilled employees is an important issue in Germany, both in the economy and in everyday politics. Companies in various sectors are complaining about difficulties in recruiting qualified labour, while political decision-makers are discussing and implementing measures to overcome this shortage. The shortage of skilled workers has an impact on the competitiveness of

the German economy and is therefore regularly addressed in political debates on education and immigration policy as well as on measures to promote training and further education.

Back to the online survey on the general indicators, where stress at work and too little work-life balance are at the top of the list of reasons. These indicators can only be influenced by the companies themselves.

### 2.3.3. Indicators female workers (DE/AT)



Cultural barriers for women in the labor market include stereotypes about suitable roles, biases in hiring and promotion, and societal expectations regarding family responsibilities. These barriers restrict women's employment opportunities and career progress.

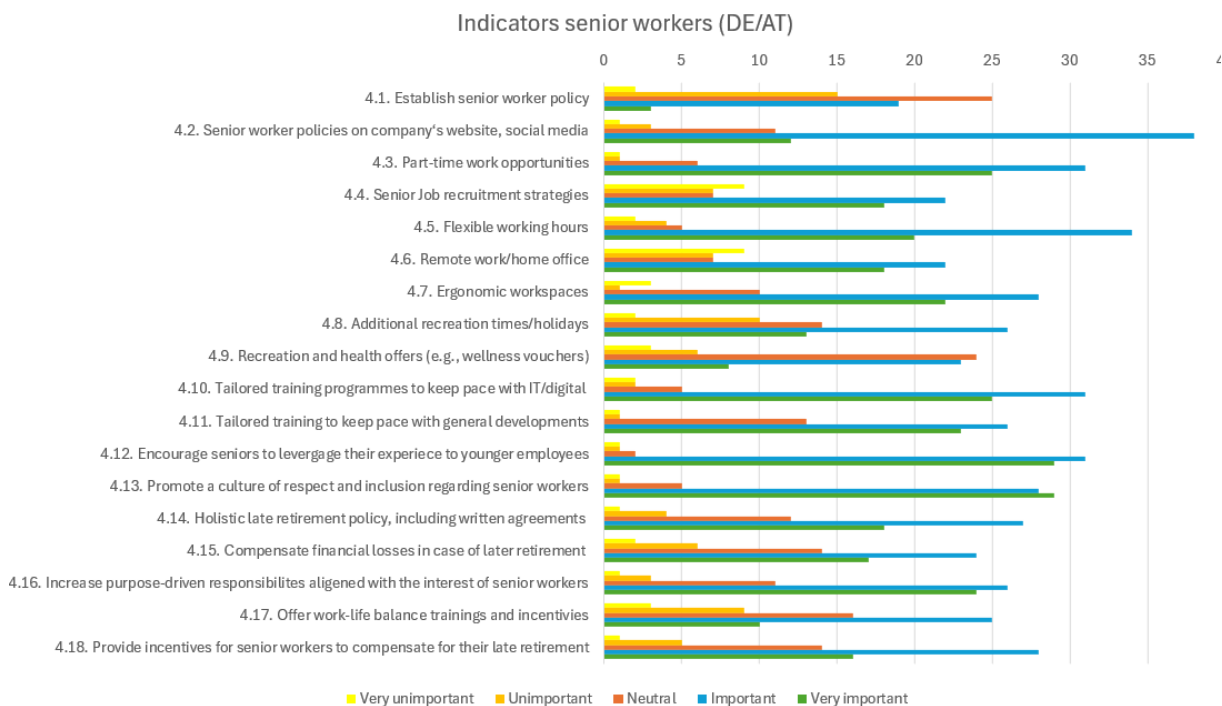
Key points include (AT/DE):

- **Unequal Opportunities:** Women have less access to employment opportunities, leading to underrepresentation in many fields.
- **Caregiving Responsibilities:** Women often take on the majority of caregiving work, which limits their availability for full-time jobs.
- **Childcare Challenges:** Few or expensive childcare options make it difficult for women to work full-time.
- **Traditional Gender Roles:** Societal norms discourage women from pursuing certain professions.

- Unequal Treatment and Pay: Women face discrimination, including lower pay and fewer advancement opportunities.
- Limited Professional Networks: Women often have less access to professional networks and mentoring.

Addressing these barriers requires challenging gender norms, promoting diversity and inclusion, and implementing policies that support work-life balance.

### 2.3.4. Indicators senior workers (DE/AT)

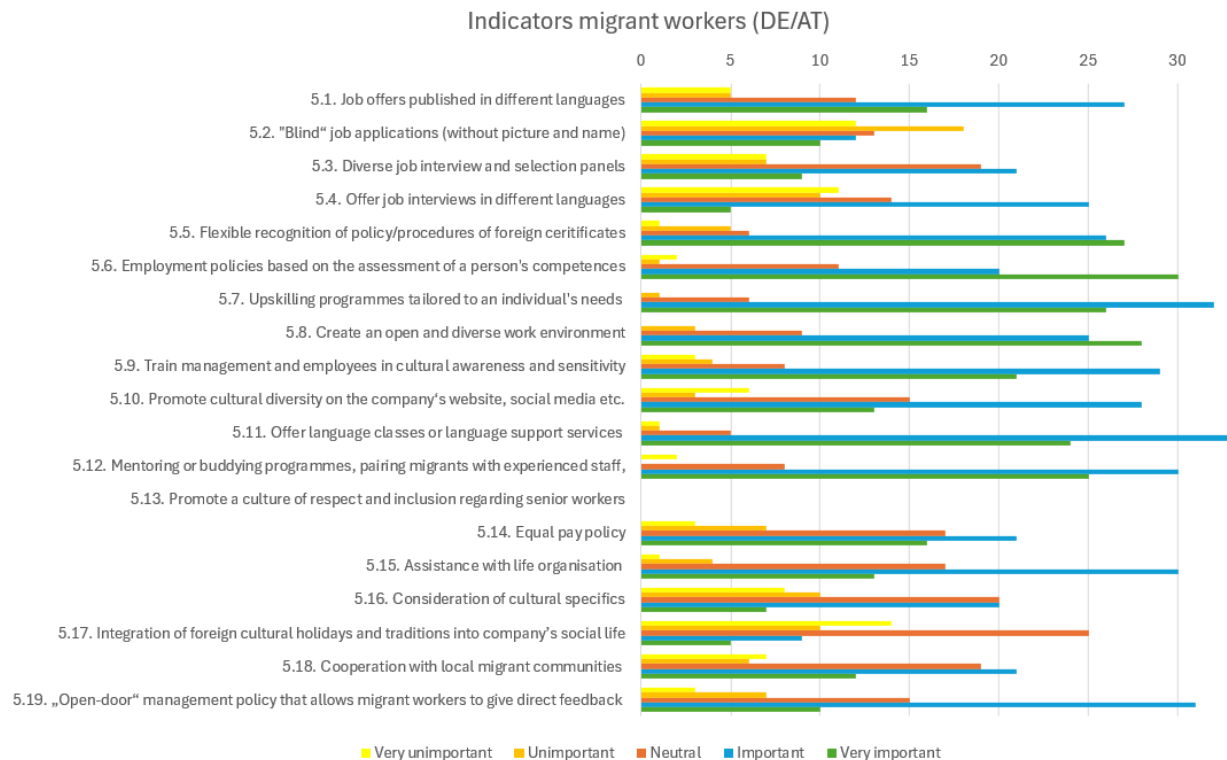


The low representation of senior workers in the labour market, especially in skilled positions, is influenced by several factors. Senior workers may find it difficult to adapt to the rapidly advancing technologies and modern tools required for skilled jobs. Employers may be reluctant to invest in training older workers as they see it as a short-term investment with limited return. There is also a perception that older workers lack motivation compared to younger workers, and concerns about physical fitness and agility may limit opportunities in physically demanding positions.

The potentially shorter remaining period of employment makes companies less willing to hire and train older workers. Health problems, both physical and mental, may affect their ability to perform certain jobs. In addition, the skills and experience of older applicants may be underestimated, resulting in them applying for fewer jobs.

They often face age-related prejudice and discrimination during the recruitment process. Working conditions and available training opportunities often do not meet their specific needs, and caring responsibilities may limit their availability and flexibility for employment.

### 2.3.5. Indicators migrant workers (DE/AT)



Language barriers prevent effective communication and integration into the organisation's workforce, while challenges in integrating into the workplace culture can lead to conflict.

Employers may have prejudices or doubts about migrants' qualifications and reliability, and there may be difficulties in accommodating religious practices or work ethics. Limited awareness of available talent among migrants, problems in assessing foreign qualifications and complex visa procedures further hinder their employment opportunities.

Improvement potential:

- Address barriers like language, prejudices, and legal restrictions to integrate migrants
- Support cultural and social integration through language education and qualification recognition.
- Combat labour market discrimination against migrants, particularly women and low-skilled workers.
- Facilitate labour market access despite delays in asylum processes.
- Provide psychological support to help migrants overcome the burdens of migration.
- Address educational challenges and promote further education opportunities.
- Emphasize the importance of language proficiency, especially in German, for successful integration.
- Ensure recognition of migrants' qualifications to enhance their employability.
- Foster a welcoming environment and fair compensation practices.
- Offer tailored training programs and vocational education.

- Increase access to qualifications and dual training programs.
- Implement diversity-oriented HR measures and mentoring programs.
- Ensure advertising is diverse and target group-specific, offering language support.
- Promote diversity in corporate culture and job advertisements.
- Cultivate a positive workplace atmosphere and intensify anti-discrimination efforts.
- Seek additional funding opportunities and support settlement in regions.

Foster respect for diverse perspectives and advocate for inclusivity in the workplace.

### 2.3.6. Indicators low-skilled workers (DE/AT)



Low-skilled workers may find it difficult to apply for jobs, lack the qualifications required by employers, face barriers to training and career progression and receive limited support from SMEs due to limited resources. In addition, deficits in social skills, general work motivation and difficulties in following rules can hinder integration into the workforce.

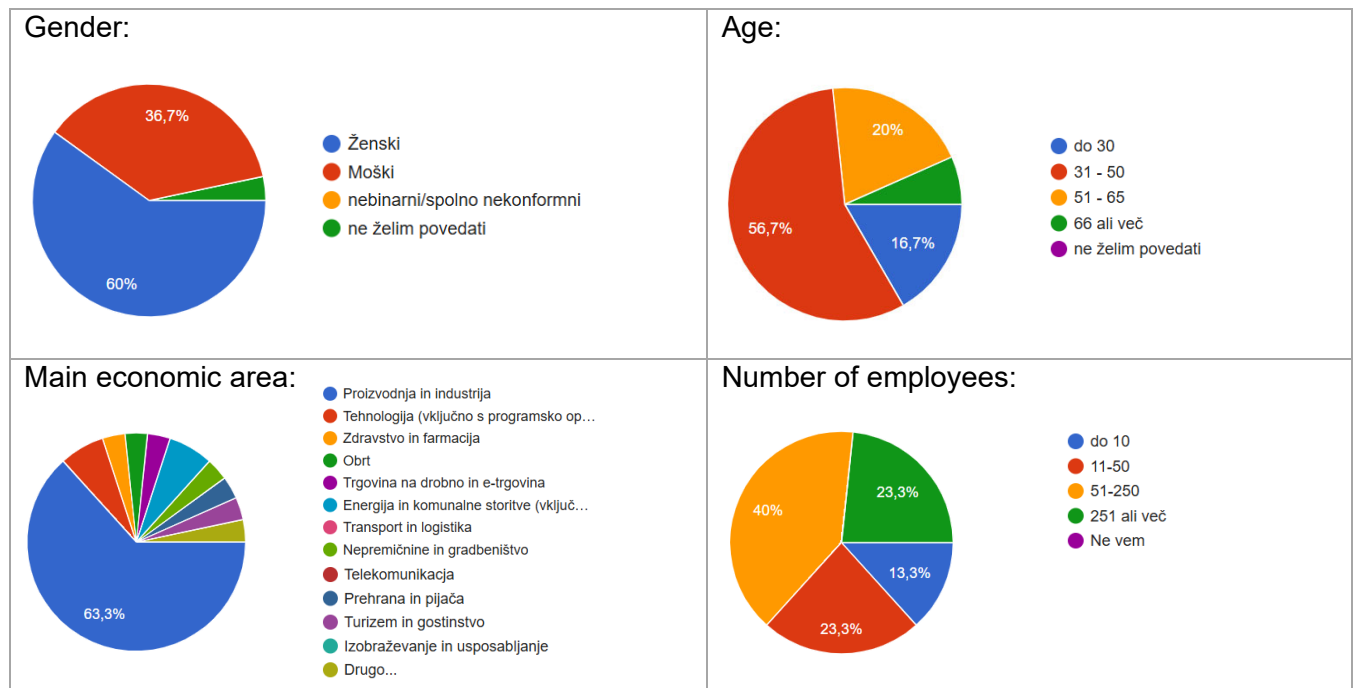
To identify areas for improvement for low-skilled workers, SMEs could review access to vocational training programmes and CV support, ensure fair recruitment processes, review talent development support systems, address first contact challenges with candidates, invest in training programmes and fair wages, raise awareness of the challenges and potential of low-skilled workers, adapt induction and application processes, and provide career planning support in an inclusive and supportive environment.

## 2.4. Quantitative Analysis SLOVENIA

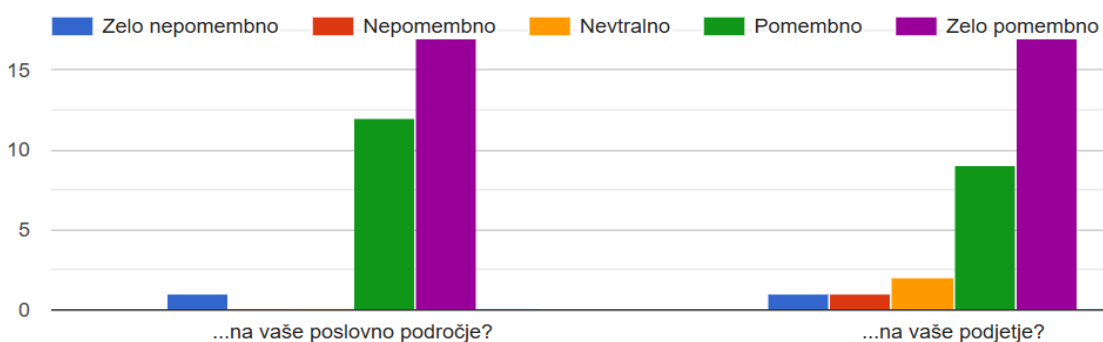


### 2.4.1. Statistic data (SI)

A total of 30 companies took part in the “Slovenia” survey...



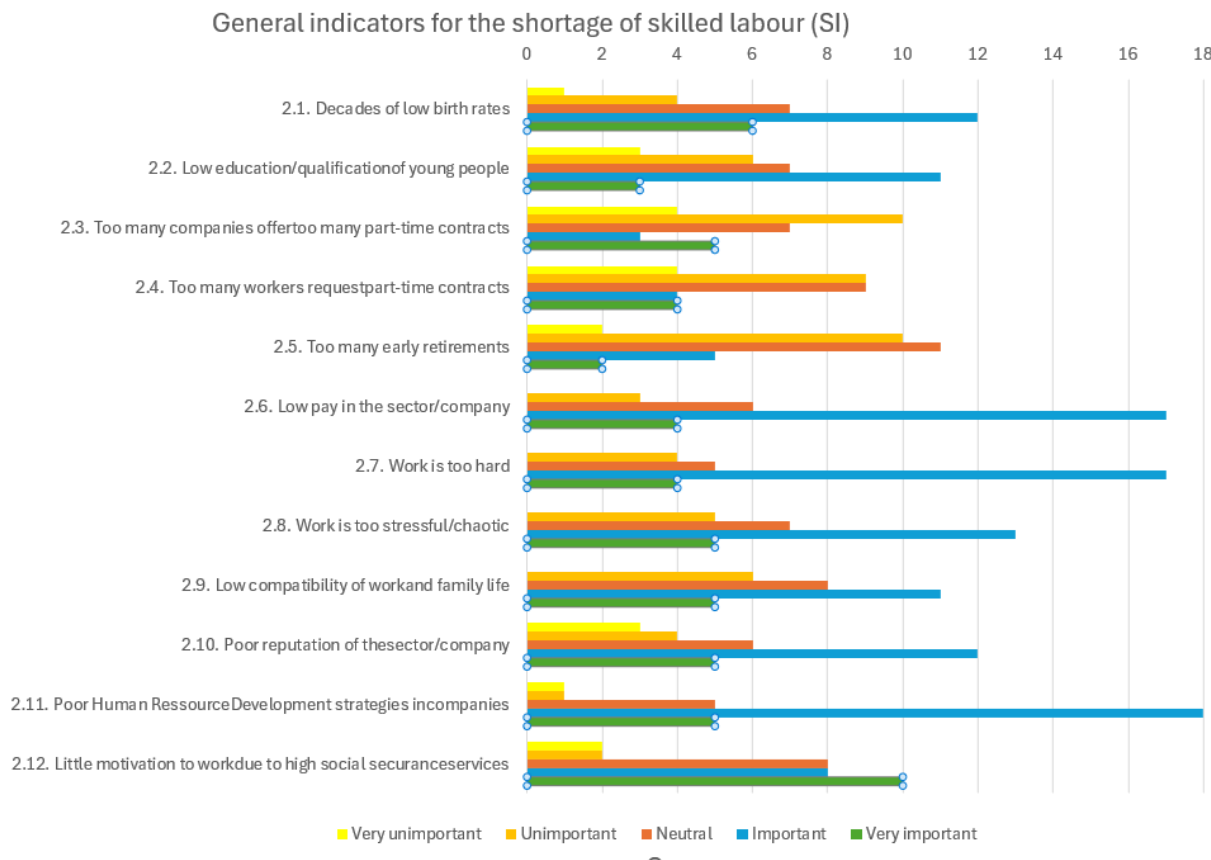
Our next question was directly related to the current shortage of skilled workers in the respective economic sector and specifically related to one's own company.



...29 out of 30 companies answered that the shortage of skilled workers has a very important effect and impact on both the business sector and their own company (26). Overall, respondents agree that the shortage of skilled workforce is a persistent and widespread problem. It impacts various sectors, with significant deficits in both high-skilled technical roles and lower-paid jobs. The issue is both an economic challenge, affecting business growth and efficiency, and a political matter, requiring better policies and strategic planning to address the integration of foreign workers and support for local workforce development.



## 2.4.2. General indicators for the shortage of skilled labour (SI)



Interestingly, the low pay and the motivation to work in the industry that certainly goes hand in hand with it becomes of great importance. On the other hand, this is an indicator that could be directly influenced by companies depending on profitability.

All manufacturing, hospitality, retail, and all professions where people have somewhat lower wages; we are caught between two worlds. Every employee wants a higher salary, while on the other hand, the capitalist world demands more work for less money.

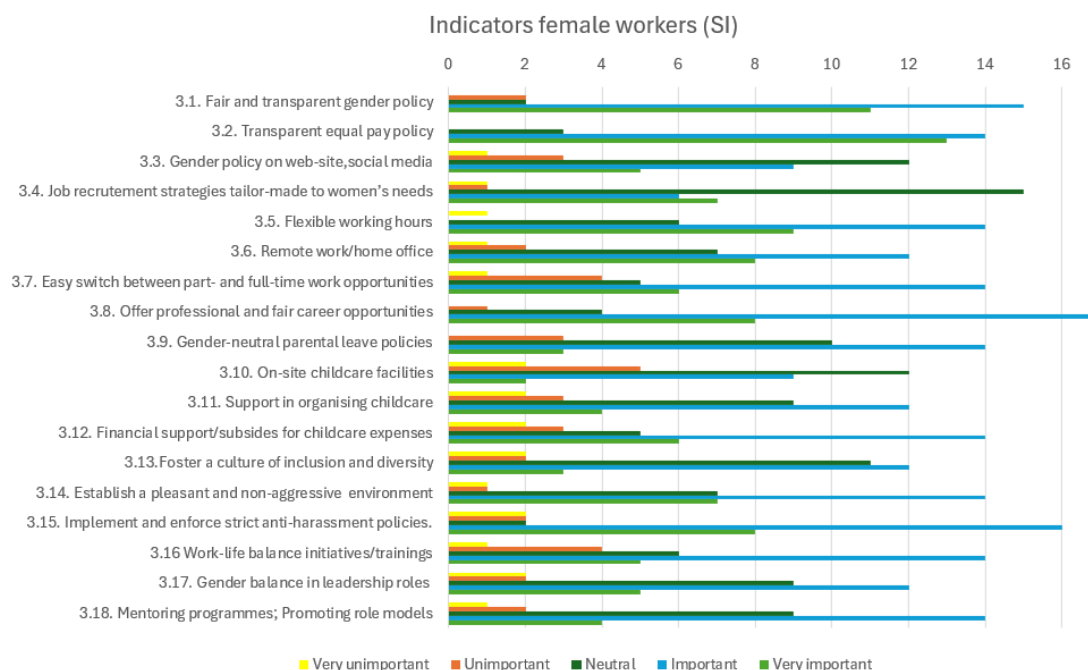
This issue is also present in other sectors, such as technical staff, machinists, and food industry workers, where specific skills are required. The worst-paid jobs are where there is massive employment, due to non-competitive wages and mass hiring.

All interviewees mainly emphasized that the state needs to help in resolving the staffing crisis. Subsidies are especially needed for employing hard-to-employ groups, and an adequate support environment must be ensured. Companies also need to recognize the HR department as strategically important.

PS: The answer I don't know was not taken into account in the evaluation.

After the general indicators, let's take a closer look at our 4 identified target groups:

### 2.4.3. Indicators female workers (SI)



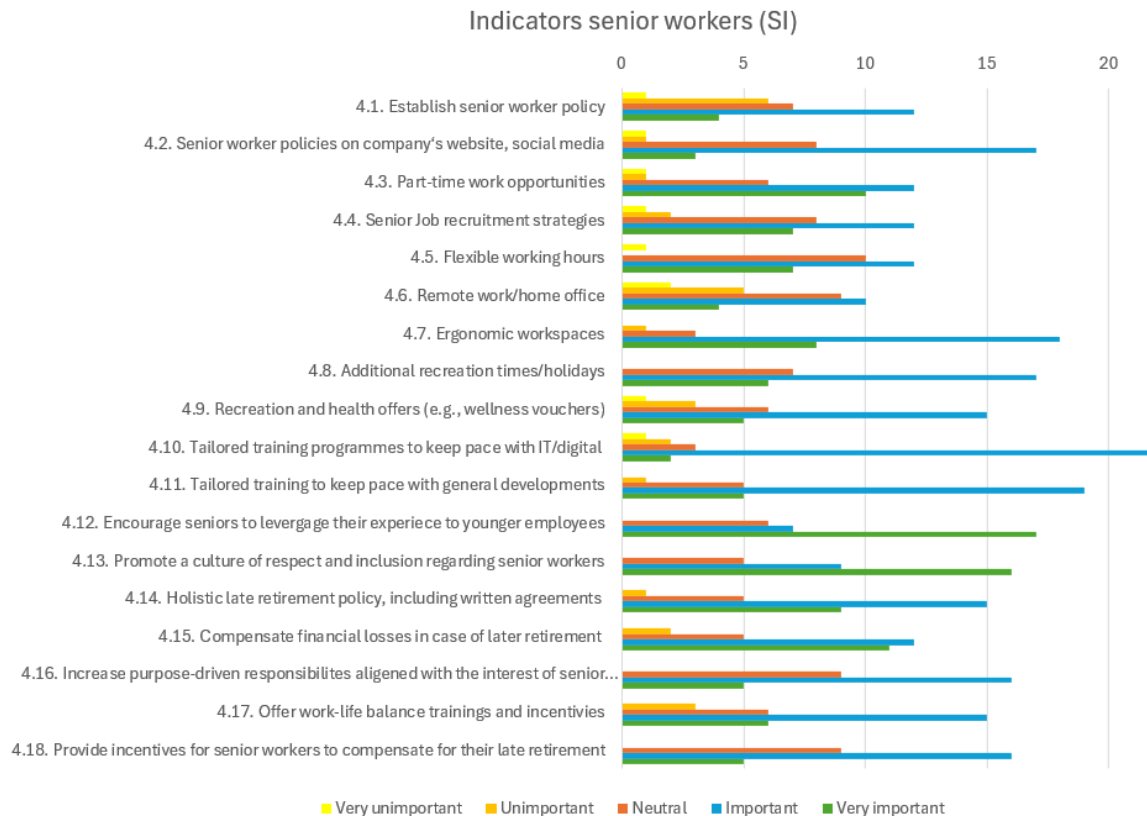
In addition to equal pay and flexible working time models, corporate policy/culture and equal career opportunities play an important or very important role for the female workforce.

In Slovenia, women have a good position, they can achieve a high level of education, and women could be encouraged to enter more technical professions, which are better paid.

The roots of women supporting multiple roles at home remain a problem in society. A woman will always have one foot at home. Fundamental functions are still on women. We need to look at competencies and tasks, not tied to gender.

When it comes to women, everyone agreed that the situation in Slovenia is much better than elsewhere in the EU. However, it is necessary to provide women with part-time work, especially after childbirth, which is already an option in Slovenia. The state should also extend kindergarten working hours and ensure that women are directed towards technical professions, which are better paid and often more flexible.

#### 2.4.4. Indicators senior workers (SI)

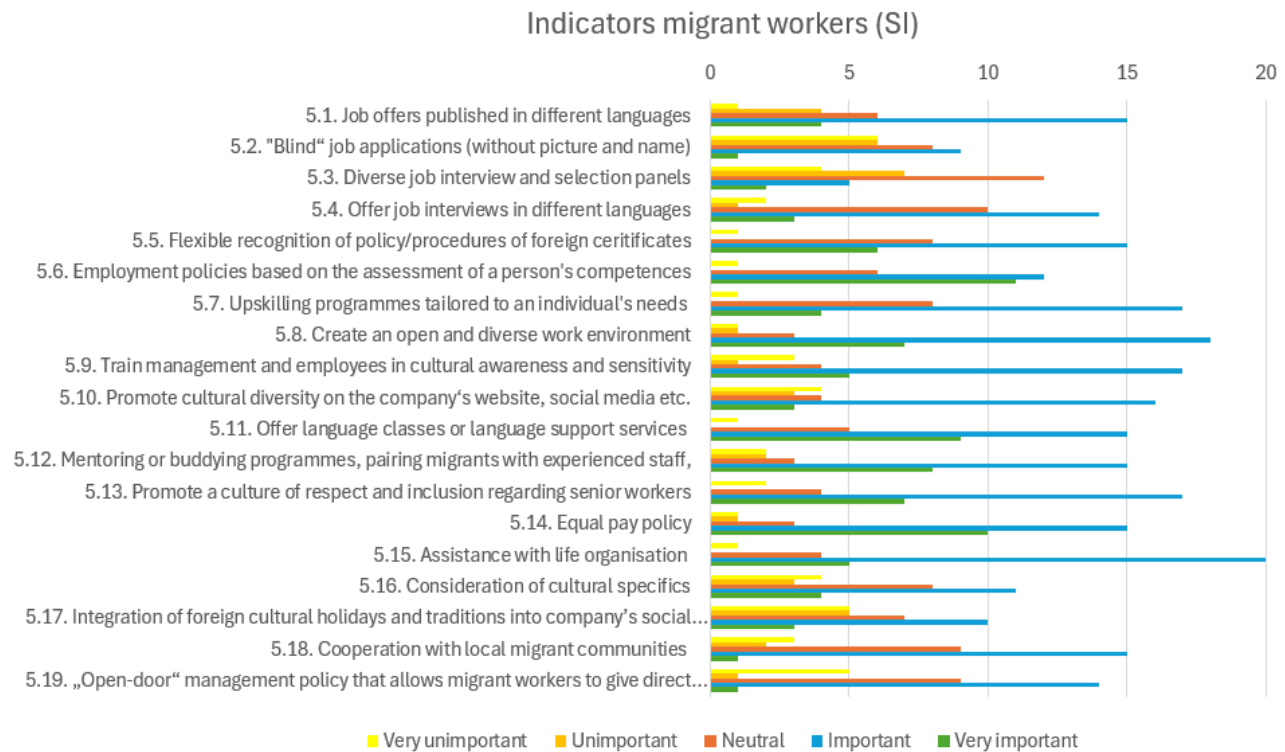


The vast majority of jobs are not designed for those over 40 years old. When someone is considered old, from 25-45, a lot is invested in employees, but after 45, it is already difficult to find a job. There are many prejudices, a lot of legislation, and finding a compromise is necessary." The company has no reservations, but there is a limitation that if they do not sign an agreement, they do not have to work night shifts. Younger retirees, regulated. How many retirees are willing to work.

For seniors, it is necessary to invest more in changing the mentality of when someone is considered old and until what age we are capable of performing certain work. The work of older employees is crucial, and the workplace needs to be adjusted for them, which can be done through reduced working hours.

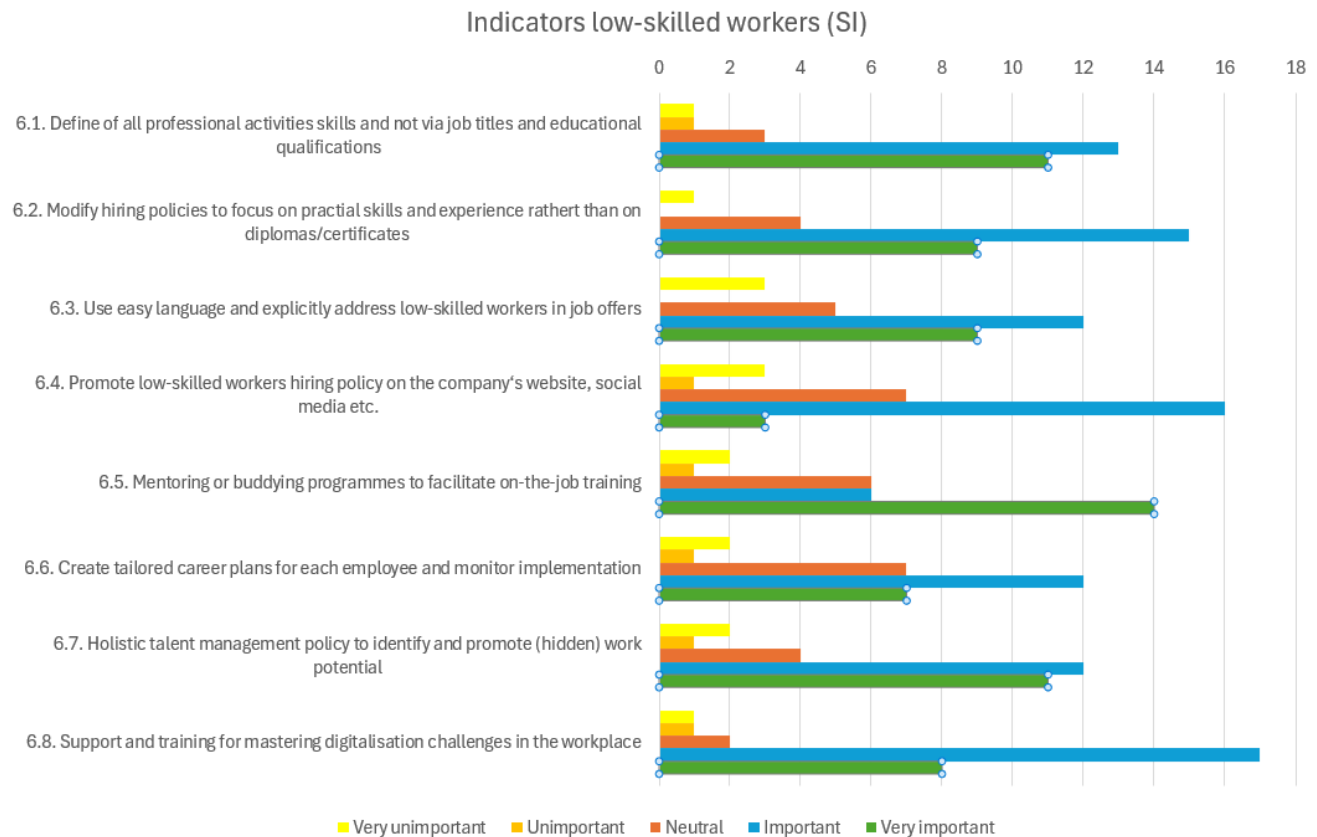
Tailored training and encouraging seniors to leverage their experiences to younger employees are the indicators that were most frequently mentioned as particularly important in the online survey.

### 2.4.5. Indicators migrant workers (SI)



Prejudices, poor strategy at the state level and within society. When the state addresses these issues, it must deal with how to ensure greater tolerance, how to ensure integration into society. The state must decide if it is going to pursue this. The state must primarily establish a strategy for integrating migrants into society. It is not enough just in the workplace; people need to feel good in society as well. It is also necessary to provide more language courses for migrants, as language is very important for integration.

## 2.4.6. Indicators low-skilled workers (SI)



Companies hiring policies and vocational training (upskilling/reskilling) were highlighted as the most important indicators.

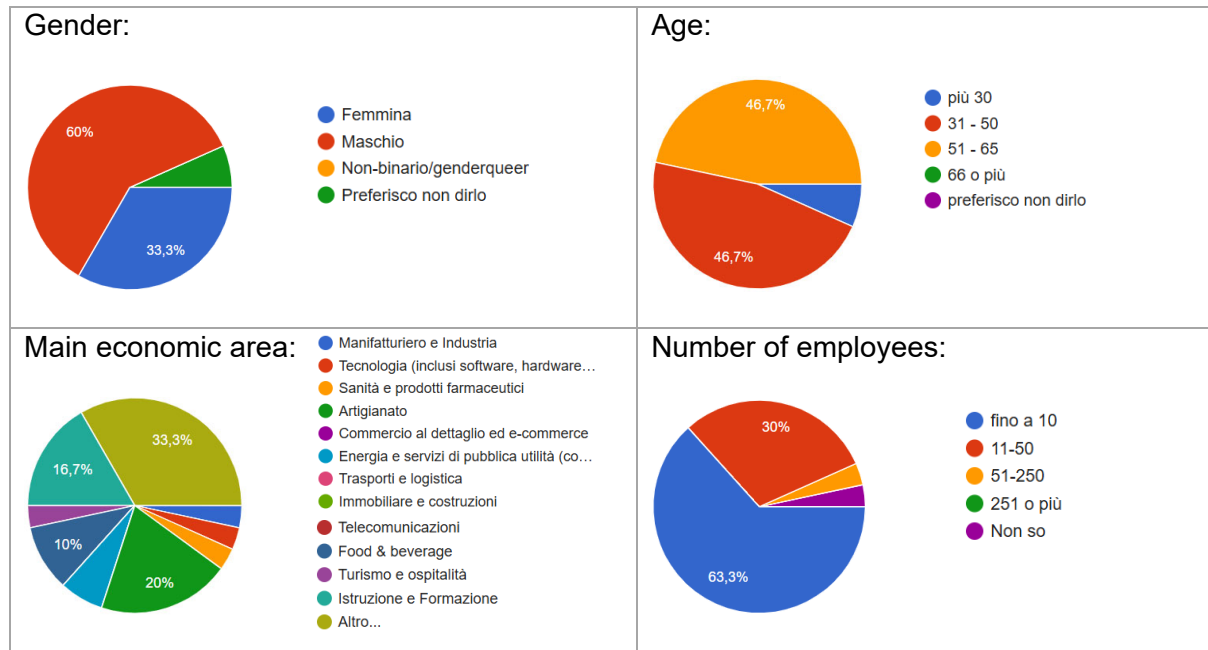
We need low-skilled workers. Is there a need in the company for a highly skilled worker? Why would we develop someone into a highly skilled worker? There is a great responsibility on the individual; you need to be proactive, seek opportunities. You need to have the desire; a lot depends on you. It is necessary to show interest. For low-skilled workers, most agreed that there needs to be an awareness that such workers are also needed in certain positions and should be directed there. In Slovenia, the current problem is that we have too few low-skilled workers and too many high-skilled ones.

## 2.5. Quantitative Analysis ITALY



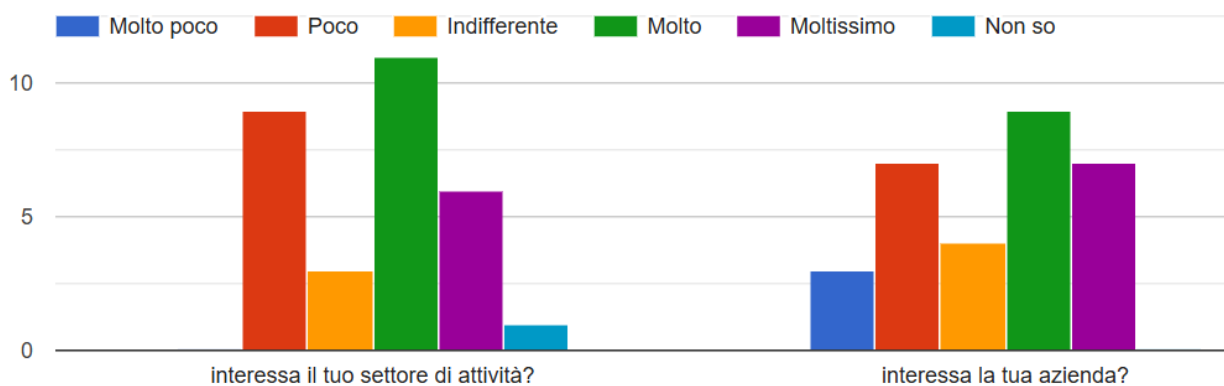
### 2.5.1. Statistic data (IT)

A total of 30 companies took part in the Italian survey...



Our next question was directly related to the current shortage of skilled workers in the respective economic sector and specifically related to one's own company.

...17 out of 30 companies answered that the shortage of skilled workers has a very important (green & violet) and effect on both the business sector and their own company (16). For this reason, there is an urgent need for action!

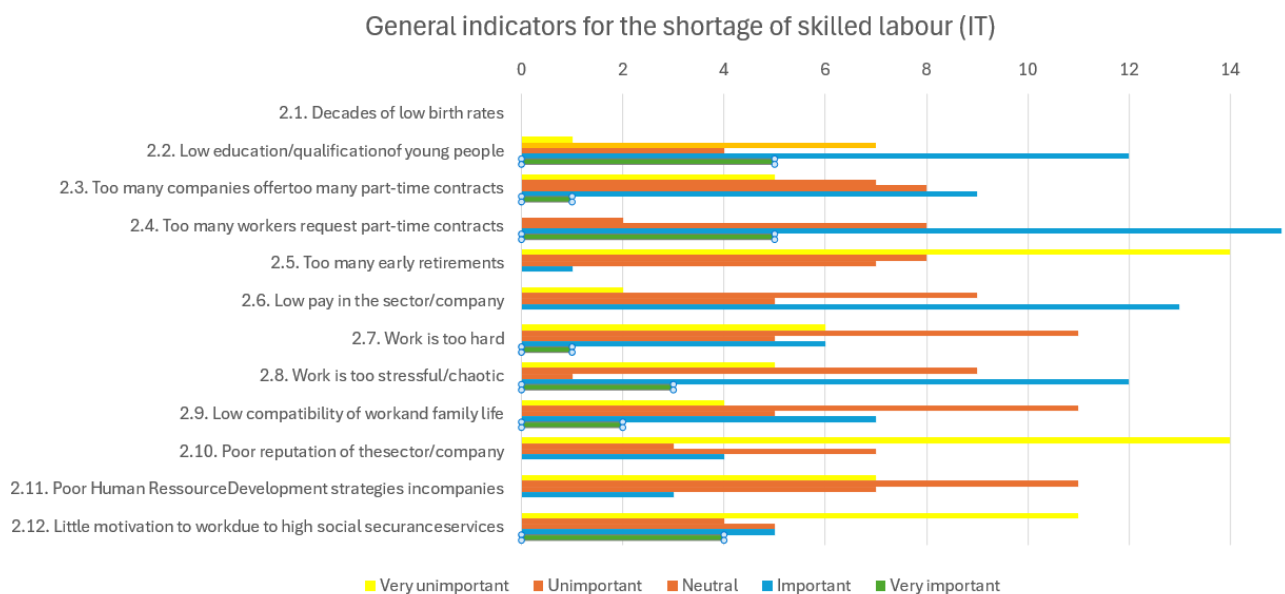


Italy, like many European countries, faces challenges related to skill shortages. Birth rates are low, and life expectancy is increasing, resulting in fewer new entrants into the workforce across various sectors.

Small, medium, and large industries face skill shortages. It's reasonable to assume that the industry requires skilled workers, especially in engineering, environmental management, and technology.

Skill shortages have important implications for national economies and education/training systems. Addressing these shortages is crucial for sustainable growth. Policymakers and stakeholders must collaborate to address these challenges and ensure a skilled workforce for the country's future prosperity.

### 2.5.2. General indicators for the shortage of skilled labour (IT)



The shortage of skilled workforce in Italy can be attributed to several key factors:

#### 1. Demographic Trends:

- **Aging Population:** Italy has an aging population, which means that a significant portion of the workforce is approaching retirement age. As older workers leave the labor market, there are fewer new entrants to replace them.
- **Low Birth Rates:** Italy's birth rates have been consistently low, leading to a smaller pool of young workers entering the workforce. This demographic shift affects various sectors.

#### 2. Educational System Challenges:

- **Mismatch Between Education and Labor Market Needs:** The education system may not always align with the skills demanded by the job market. For instance, there might be a shortage of graduates in specific fields (such as STEM) while an oversupply in others.
- **Lack of Vocational Training:** Vocational training and apprenticeship programmes are essential for developing practical skills. However, their availability and attractiveness to students can vary. But are mostly not high/adequate.



### 3. Brain Drain and Migration:

- **Emigration of Skilled Workers:** Italy has experienced a “brain drain” phenomenon, where highly skilled individuals emigrate to other countries in search of better opportunities. This exacerbates skill shortages domestically.
- **Immigration Challenges:** While immigration can help address skill gaps, it also presents challenges related to integration, language barriers, and recognition of foreign qualifications.

### 4. Sector-Specific Factors:

- **Technology and Innovation:** Rapid technological advancements require specialized skills. The demand for ICT professionals, data scientists, and software developers outpaces supply.
- **Healthcare and Aging Population:** As the population ages, healthcare needs increase. The shortage of medical professionals (doctors, nurses, etc.) is particularly acute.
- **Environmental Concerns:** The emphasis on sustainability and green practices necessitates professionals with expertise in environmental science, renewable energy, and ESG compliance.

### 5. Labor Market Dynamics:

- **Job Mobility and Preferences:** Workers’ preferences for certain industries or regions affect the distribution of skills. Some areas may struggle to attract talent due to factors like cost of living or lack of amenities.
- **Job Insecurity and Precarious Work:** Concerns about job stability and precarious employment arrangements can discourage individuals from pursuing certain careers.
- **Underpayment:** salaries are not competitive and drive potential workers to emigrate (see point 3) or to accept underpaid jobs (they are over skilled).

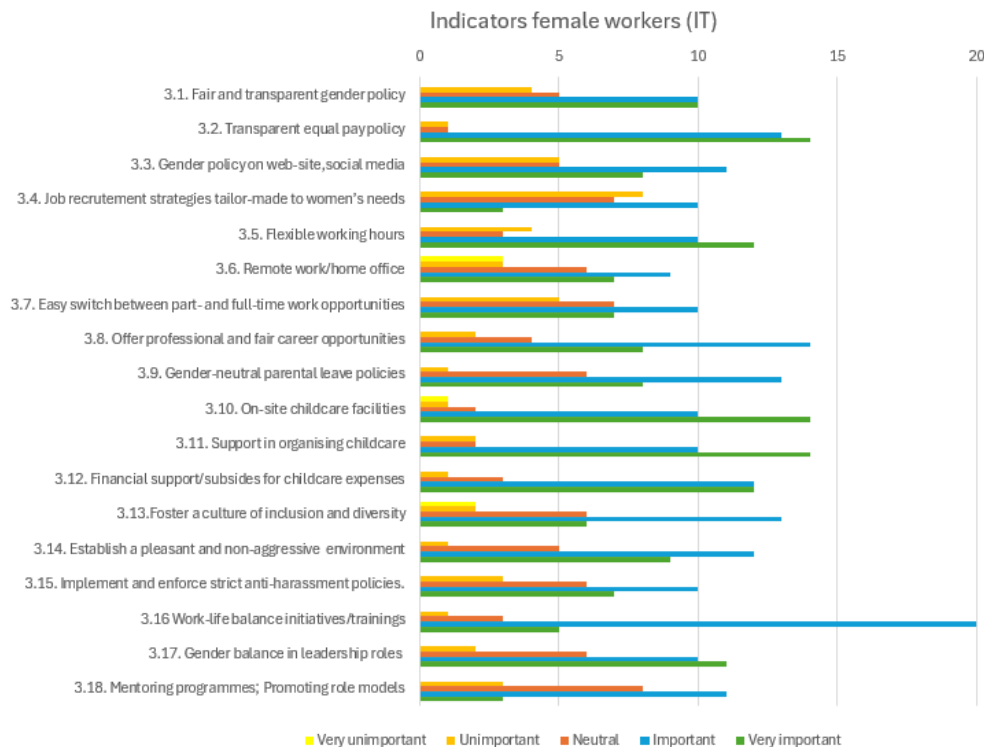
### 6. Policy and Investment:

- **Investment in Education and Training:** Policymakers need to invest in education, vocational training, and lifelong learning. Encouraging students to pursue STEM fields and vocational paths is crucial.
- **Industry Collaboration:** a closer collaboration between educational institutions and industries can help tailor curricula to meet market demands.
- **Attracting and Retaining Talent:** Policies that attract skilled workers (both domestic and foreign) and retain them within Italy are essential.
- **Backwardness of small family businesses:** Lack of training and entrepreneurship culture, together with an old-fashioned organizational style, prevent them from being able to attract and retain the talent they need.

In summary, a combination of demographic shifts, educational challenges, sector-specific dynamics, and policy decisions contribute to the shortage of skilled workforce in Italy. Addressing these factors requires a holistic approach involving stakeholders from government, academia, and industry.

After the general indicators, let's take a closer look at our 4 identified target groups:

### 2.5.3. Indicators female workers (IT)

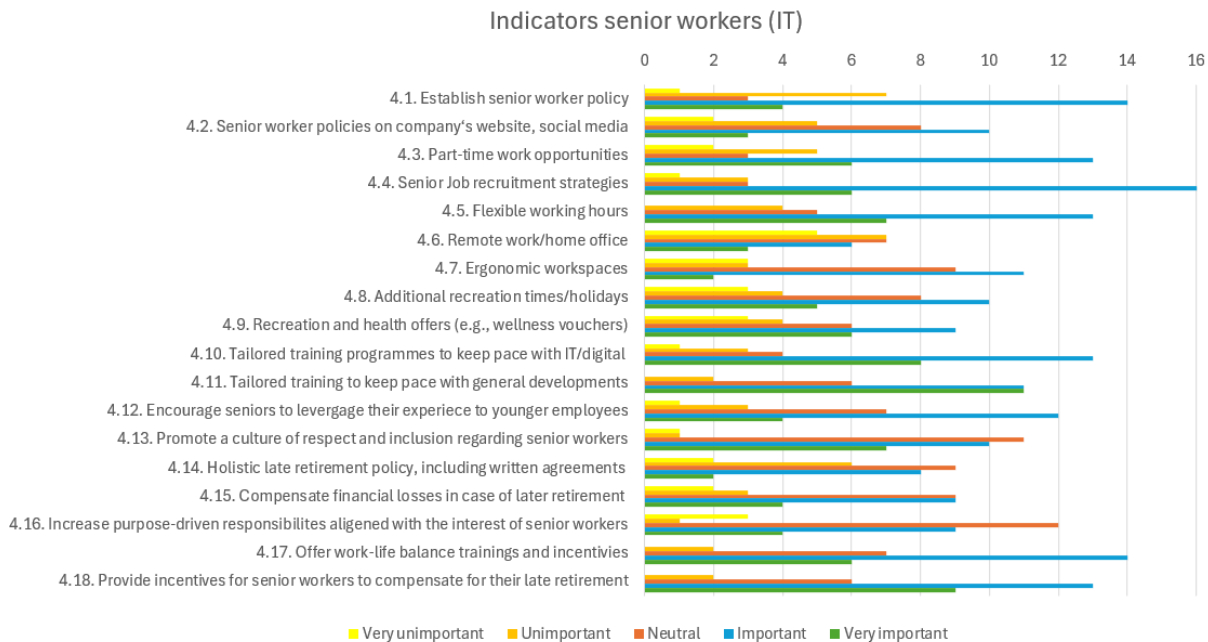


In addition to equal pay and flexible working time models, corporate policy/culture as well as equal career opportunities play an important or very important role for the female workforce.

The improvement-related criteria are listed in order of relevance:

1. **GENDER INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT:** the recruitment processes should be reviewed to ensure they are free from bias and can detect the needed competences.
2. **WORK-LIFE BALANCE:** Promoting the reconciliation of work and family time is a decisive factor in the full inclusion of women in the world of work, and especially women with the skills needed in the companies.
3. **MENTORSHIP:** mentorship programmes should connect women employees with experienced leaders. These programmes provide guidance, boost confidence, and facilitate career growth.
4. **NETWORKING:** networking events where women can connect with industry peers, potential clients, and mentors. Networking enhances visibility and professional growth.

## 2.5.4. Indicators senior workers (IT)



Senior employment in Italy is among the highest in the world. This is due to several factors, first of all the pension system: to retire you need either to reach a retirement age of 67 or a contribution age of 42 years. This of course means that there has been a significant aging of the Italian working population.

The turnover in previous years was also low because of large national budget deficits, and clearly today we have a wide aging process of the working population in all areas, whether industrial, commercial, agricultural, or public administration.

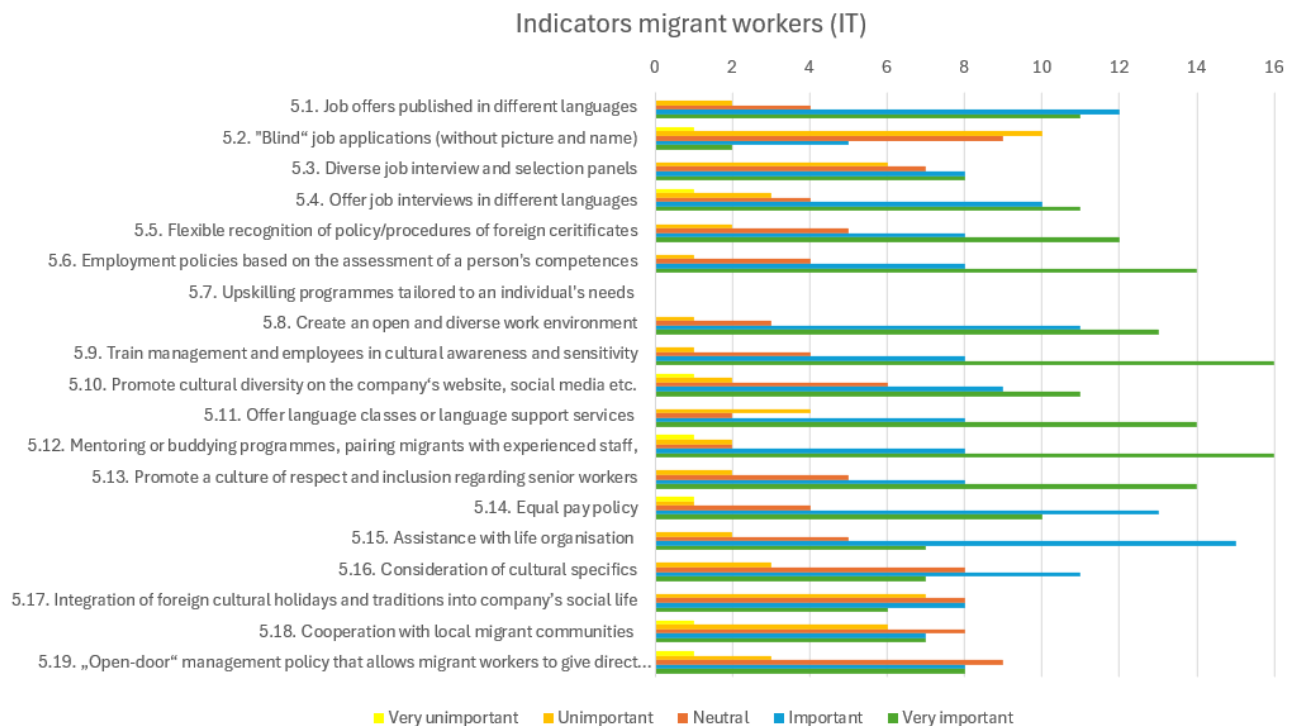
This situation is also because many workers have been qualified in the corporate sector, moving up the ladder and with high salaries so they have no interest in leaving. Although there are retirement incentives, they do not retire.

Taking into consideration the Italian situation, the representation of seniors in the Italian labour market, particularly as skilled workers, is influenced by several factors.

- **DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION AND PENSION REFORMS:** Italy has experienced both demographic changes and pension reforms. As a result, the age structure of the labour force has transformed significantly.
- **QUALITY OF TERRITORIAL RESOURCES:** The availability and quality of resources in different regions play a crucial role. Factors such as investments, infrastructures, and territory characteristics impact employment rates. For workers aged 55–64, these factors have a greater influence, while for those over 65, other determinants come into play.
- **JOB-RELATED VARIABLES:** While education, sex, and geographical location have some effect on low-wage persistence, job-related variables are more effective in preventing falls into low pay from higher pay. These variables include job stability, skills, and industry-specific demands.

In Italy, the presence of senior workers is strong in a good percentage of companies of all sizes and is not one of the priorities for improving the labor market - unless it is for the first employment or re-employment of older people. In any case, adopting practices of JOB REDESIGN AND AGE-DIVERSE LEADERSHIP can benefit SMEs and all the other companies and help them enhance the contribution of older workers.

### 2.5.5. Indicators migrant workers (IT)

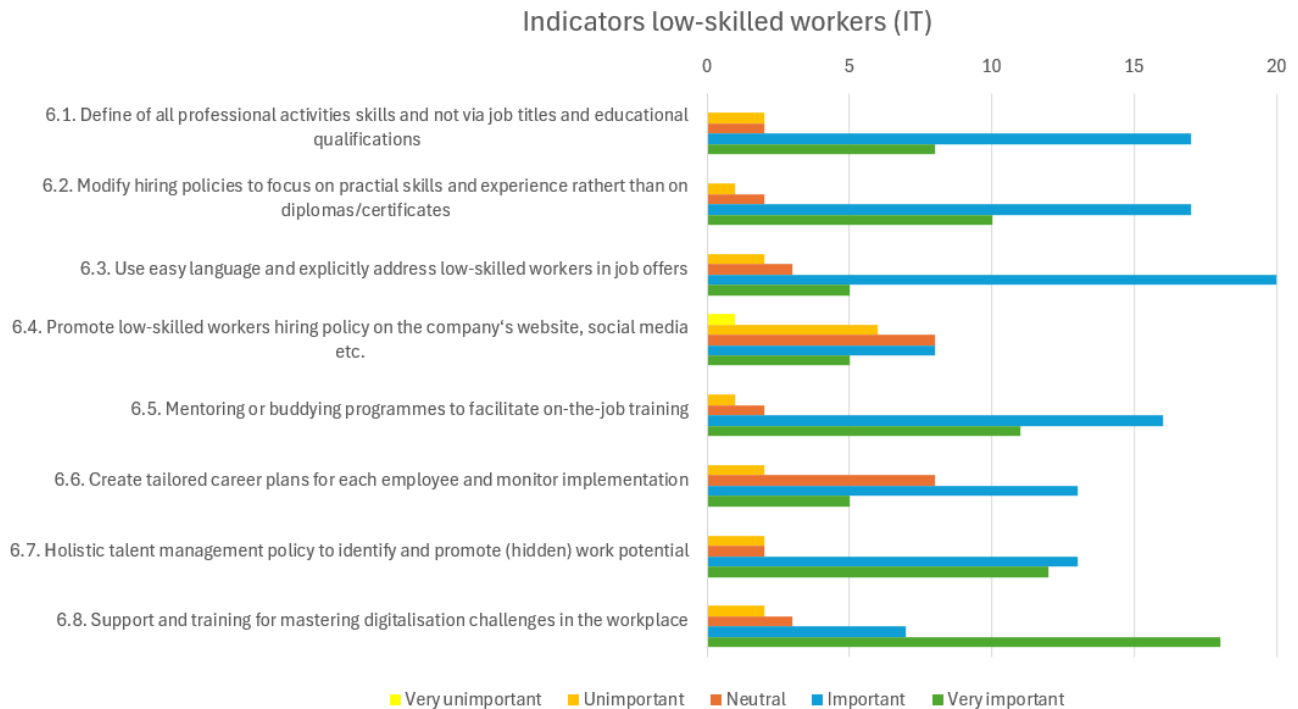


Italy mainly attracts unskilled migrants, the employability of senior workers in Italian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) involves addressing several challenges.

The improvement-related criteria are listed in order of relevance:

- **RECOGNITION OF COMPETENCES AND PRIOR LEARNING:** Preventing brain waste and enhancing skills of migrant workers, to avoid overqualification and concentration in blue-collar positions.
- **MENTORSHIP:** mentorship programmes where experienced employees can guide and support migrant workers. Mentors can provide insights into workplace norms, career advancement, and professional growth.
- **HOUSING AND ACCESS TO SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES:** employers should provide support to migrant workers to prevent them from falling into the poverty trap. This does not require huge resources but the setting up of a welcoming and follow up service.

### 2.5.6. Indicators low-skilled workers (IT)



The improvement-related criteria are listed in order of relevance:

- **CAREER GUIDANCE:** Young people, especially in inland and rural areas, do not have access to complete and up-to-date information on the labour market and educational offerings, which has a negative impact on their choices and future employment.
- **JOB REDESIGN AND TASK SIMPLIFICATION:** Simplifying job tasks and reducing unnecessary complexities can make positions more accessible to low-skilled workers. Job redesign is useful to match tasks with workers' skill levels.
- **SKILL ASSESSMENT:** each worker's skills and areas of potential improvement should be periodically analyzed so that a path for progression in terms of training and career can be defined.
- **MENTORSHIP:** mentorship helps workers integrate and grow professionally within the company.

### 3. WEIGHTING OF SINGLE INDICATORS AND POTENTIAL IDENTIFIERS AGAINST EACH OTHER'S IMPORTANCE IN BUSINESS REALITY (SUMMARY ALL COUNTRIES)

After evaluating the individual results of all partner countries, an overall analysis was carried out. For this purpose, all country results were summarised, and the weighted average was determined across all indicators.

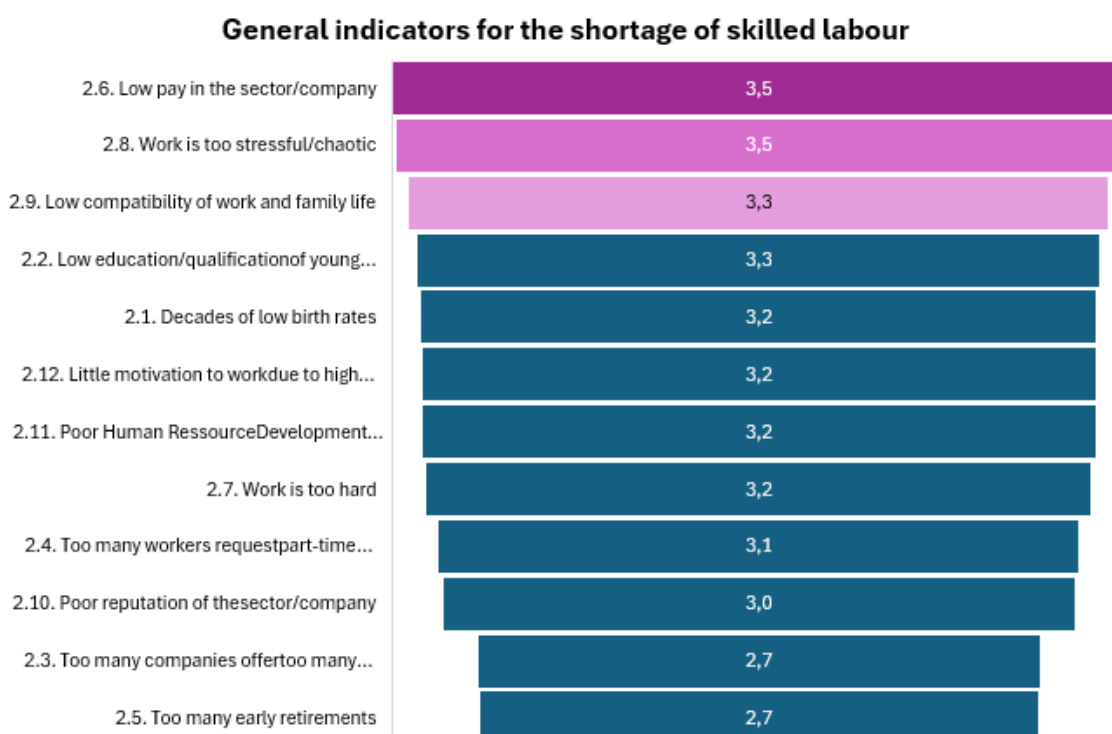
A **weighted average** or weighted mean is an average which is obtained by combining different numbers of indicators according to the relative importance of each.

A weighted average or mean is one where each indicator being averaged is multiplied by a number (weight) based on the indicator's relative importance, rather than treating each item equally.

The weights or weightings are the equivalent of having that many similar indicators with the same value involved in the average. The result is summed, and the total is divided by the sum of the weights.

Afterwards, the results were sorted in descending order, and we received a ranking of single indicators and potential identifiers against each other's importance in business reality.

#### 3.1. General indicators for the shortage of skilled labour – weighted average over all partner countries

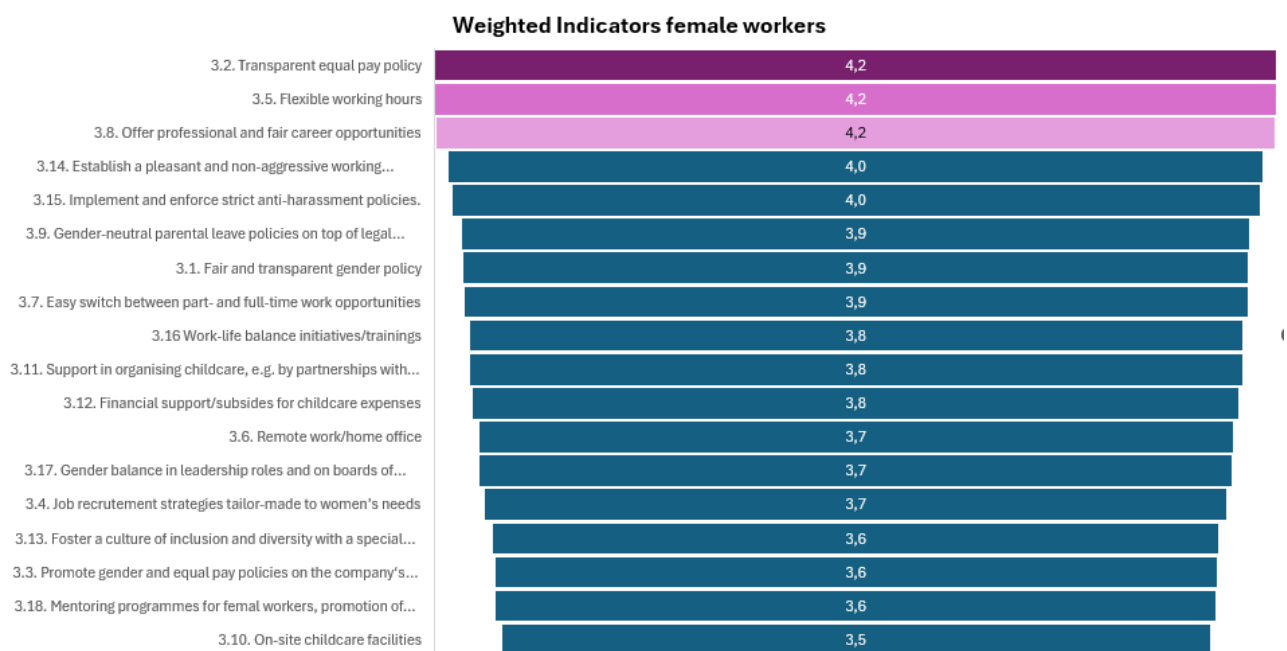


We are dealing with various factors, we will summarize general indicators for the shortage of skilled workers in our European partner countries. First and foremost are

- **Economic & Labor Market Factors** - Low pay / Wages in Certain Skilled Professions
- Technological Advancements & Industry Evolution – Work is too stressful / chaotic
- **Social & Cultural Factors** - Work-Life Balance Preferences – Younger generations often prioritize flexible work arrangements, while some skilled jobs require rigid schedules or long hours.
- **Education & Training Gaps** - Mismatch Between Education and Industry Needs

After that, demographic changes will follow throughout Europe, for example a more and more aging workforce and declining birth rates all over Europe.

### 3.2. Weighted Indicators female workers:



Female workers face a range of challenges in the workplace, many of which stem from societal norms, workplace policies, and structural inequalities. Here are some key challenges:

#### 1. Gender Pay Gap

- Women often earn less than men for the same work, even in industries where they are well-represented.
- Pay disparities persist due to factors like occupational segregation and lack of salary transparency.



## 2. Flexible working hours- Work-Life Balance - Care Responsibilities

- Women are more likely to take on caregiving responsibilities (childcare, eldercare), leading to career interruptions or reduced work hours.
- Lack of affordable childcare options forces many women to leave the workforce or work part-time.
- Workplaces with rigid schedules make it difficult for women to balance professional and personal responsibilities.

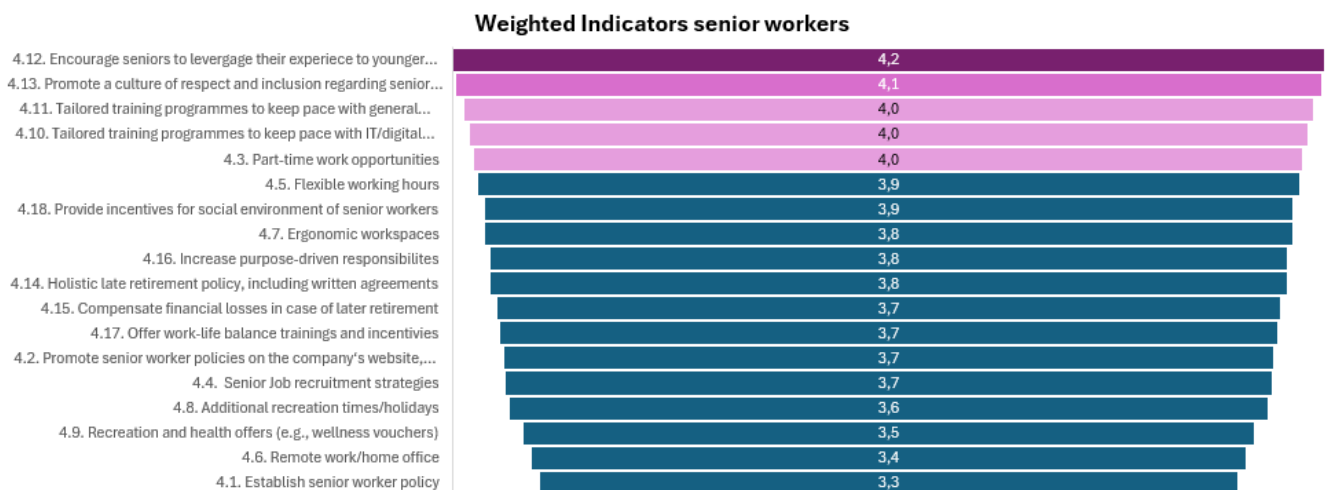
## 3. Fair career opportunities - Gender Bias & Discrimination

- Women often face unconscious bias, where their skills and leadership potential are undervalued.
- Stereotypes about "women's roles" in certain industries limit opportunities for advancement.

## 4. Workplace Policies & Lack of Support

- Many companies lack proper maternity leave, paid parental leave, or flexible work arrangements.
- Returning to work after maternity leave can be challenging, with fewer opportunities for career advancement.

## 3.3 Weighted Indicators senior workers



On top of the weighted indicators for senior workers we find:

### Knowledge Transfer and Succession Planning

Encourage seniors to leverage the experiences of younger employees. Knowledge transfer between younger and older employees can help to prevent organizational knowledge loss and contribute to business success. However, despite its potential benefits, knowledge transfer does not occur automatically.##

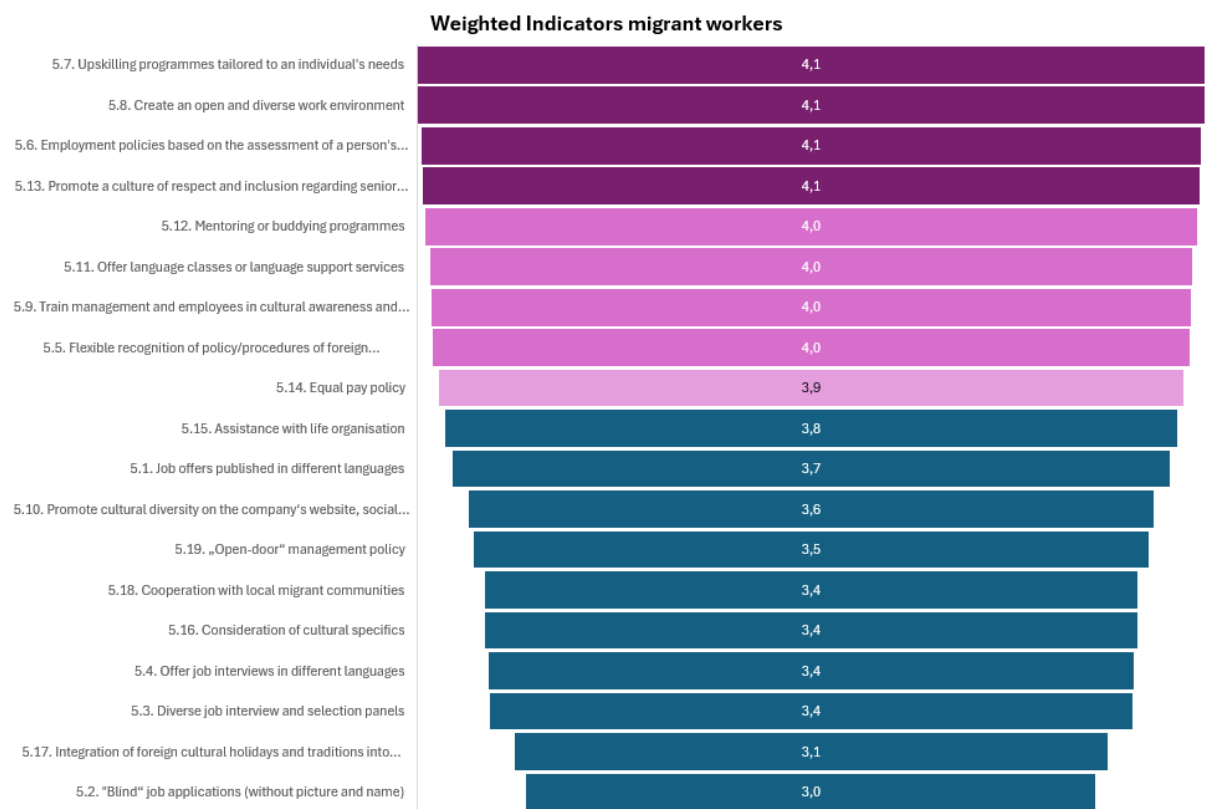
### Workplace Culture & Age Discrimination (Ageism)

Many employers assume older workers are less productive, adaptable, or technologically skilled. Hiring biases often favour younger candidates, making it harder for seniors to find new jobs. Older employees may be overlooked for promotions or leadership roles.

### Tailored Training - Adapting to Technological Changes

Rapid advancements in digital tools, AI, and automation can create skill gaps for older workers. Companies may invest less in training senior employees, assuming they will retire soon. A lack of tailored training programs makes it harder for older workers to upskill.

## 3.4 Weighted Indicators migrant workers



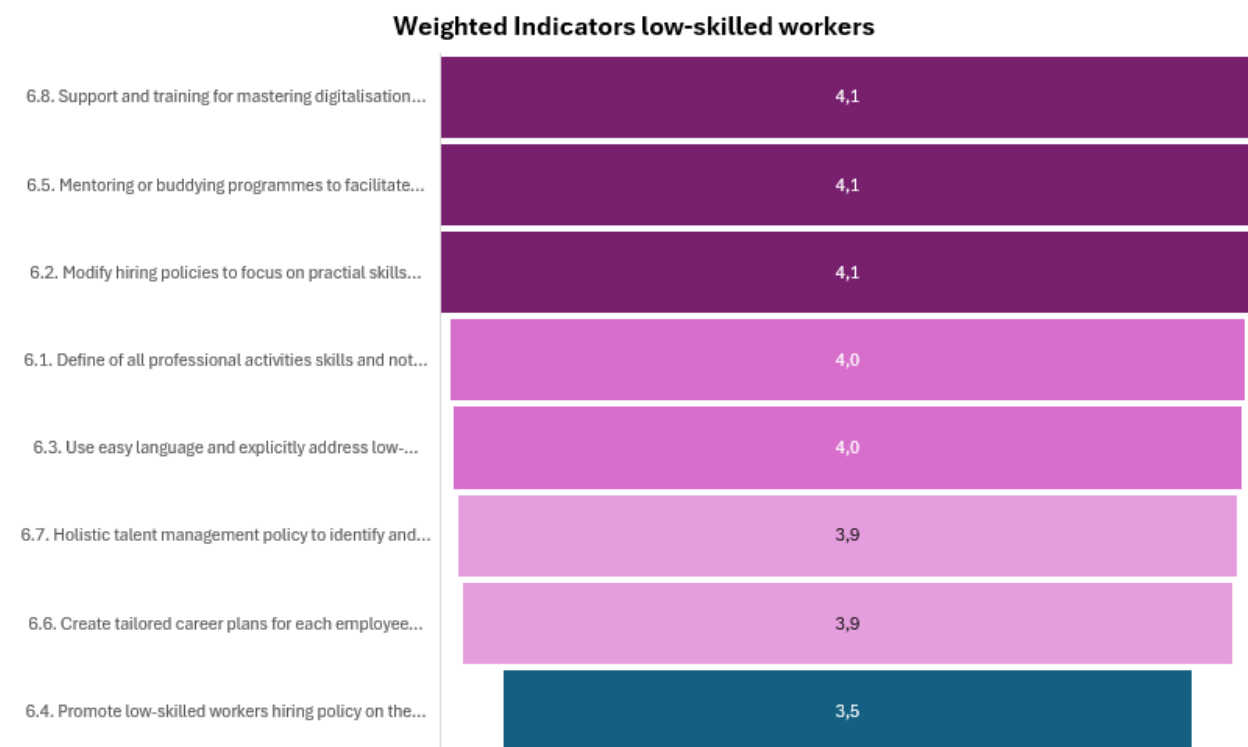
Migrant workers face a variety of challenges related to employment, legal status, social integration, and workplace conditions. Language barriers and lack of recognition of skills often prevent migrants from advancing in their careers.

For example, the question about upskilling training programmes tailored to an individual need's receives the highest score. The same number of points was achieved by "creating an open and diverse work environment", "employment policies based on the assessment of the persons competences" and a "culture of respect". In addition to the language & Communication barriers a lack of recognition of skills often prevent migrants from advancing in their careers.

Certification and competence complement each other. It's important for employees to receive some in-depth training and certification, but putting the training into practice is what really makes that knowledge stick and improves workplace safety records.

Employers can begin by assigning work based on what employees can *actually* do, rather than what their certificates say they can do. In addition to creating a safer workplace, the competency approach can provide much-needed support to employees, boosting morale and the company's bottom line.

### 3.5 Weighted Indicators low-skilled workers



Low-skilled adults often accumulate several vulnerabilities and are furthest away from the labour market or are in precarious jobs and at risk of unemployment, yet they benefit the least from upskilling and re-skilling opportunities. But let's take a closer look at the challenges and opportunities they face in the labour market.

In the group of low-skilled workers, the “Adapting to Technological Changes”, in particular the “Training and support regarding digitalisation” was one on the top. Rapid advancements in digital tools, AI, and automation can create great barriers for low-qualified people. But many low-skilled jobs do not offer employer-sponsored training or education programs.

“Mentoring or buddying programmes to facilitate on-the-job training” were also highlighted as very important for the successful employment of low-skilled workers.

The need for a paradigm shift in the workforce was also mentioned to be of great importance. In view of the problem of skilled workers, it is really important to use all potentials. Policies that prioritise informal skills and competencies over formal certificates should play a key role in recruiting new employees, especially when considering low-skilled workers. Empowering low-skilled adults by means of promoting their upskilling and re-skilling must be seen as a priority, especially nowadays that employment and the economy overall is becoming skills intensive.

## 4. SUMMARY / CONCLUSION

The main aim of this empirical investigative factor and potential research activity was the identification of credible and valid indicators for the detection of improvement potential on company levels to tackle the problem of shortage of skilled workforce. Besides the identification of single indicators and criteria it was also the task of this activity to put the indicators in a ranking and weighting list according to the opinions of the target group representatives. All indicators are supposed to touch the 4 defined action levels from the ELEVATE project application (women, older workers, migrant workers and low-skilled workers).

On the basis of a qualitative interview-based survey with experts, different indicators have been detected and put for further ranking and weighting into a quantitative online survey for SME representatives. Finally, a comprehensive collection of indicators for all four action levels have been developed and ranked for further use during the ELEVATE project development. While for female workers a transparent equal pay policy as well as flexible working hours are seen as the most important factors on company level, the possibility to leverage the knowledge to younger workers as well as a general supportive company culture for older or senior workers are the most important indicators to be investigated on company level when wanting to improve the employment rate of senior skilled workers. On the level of migrant workers companies would benefit from having broad upskilling programmes, a general supportive and diversity friendly company culture or also an employment and hiring policy that is clearly built on the assessment of one's competences and not so much on certificates and diplomas. When focusing on elevating the potential of low-skilled workers a close eye should be put on offering support and training to master the digitalisation challenges on company level but also on the establishment of concrete mentoring or buddying programmes for low-skilled workers to raise their qualification and competence level.

All deductions made from the two-step investigation and research process will now be used further in a collection of ranked indicators as basis for the development of an online potential and gap scanner for companies allowing SMEs to assess the relevant criteria for their organisation and deduct gaps and improvement potentials which will then be further exploited during a dedicated strategy workshop developed and tested in the ELEVATE project.

**The ELEVATE project partnership, January 2025**

## 5. ANNEX

### 5.1 [Interview Guideline](#)



### 5.2. [Online Questionnaire](#)

