Italy: Internet usage and digital skills

Internet usage

With 53% of the population using the internet on a **regular** basis, that is to say once a week, Italy is below the European average of 70%, although the rate has increased by 2 p.p. since 2011 (as has the EU average). Italians go online **frequently** (at least once a day) at a rate of 51%, (up from 49% in 2011), which compares with the average European rate of 59%. As for people who have **never used the internet**, they account for 37% in 2012, down from 39% in 2011, almost double the EU average of 22%. Furthermore regular internet use by **disadvantaged** people is 38%, 16 pp. below the EU average of 54%.

New data on mobile use of the internet shows that Italy is lagging behind in this regard: while an average 36% of EU citizens accessed the internet via a mobile device in 2012, in Italy the rate is 16%, a figure very distant from the leaders in the EU (UK and Sweden, with rates of 63% and 70% respectively). But Italian enterprises are in line with the European average with regard to providing their staff with portable devices for accessing the internet (47% in Italy, 48% as the EU average).

Similarly to their European peers for Italians internet is chiefly an instrument used to access information on goods and services, read the news, as well as to draw on travel and accommodation services. The most popular activity is finding information about goods and services with a rate of 41%, still below the EU average of 62%. Italian users are also using the internet for a large part to read and download online newspapers (30%, but way below the EU average of 45% in 2012), and to make travel and accommodation arrangements (25%, down 5 pp. from 2011 and below the EU average of 36%). Also noteworthy is the moderate
use on internet banking in Italy (only 21% have used it in Italy in 2012, which compares with the EU average of 40%).

**Digital Competence/ICT skills**

56% of citizens in Italy have some level of computer skills, a rate still well below the average for the EU of 67%. But the data for Italy shows that in 2012 24% of the population had high computer skills, a stable value since 2009 and close to the corresponding EU average of 27%. Low and medium level of computer skills in Italy are nevertheless 4 to 5p.p. below the European averages of 16% and 25% respectively, which explains the lower total value of computer skills in Italy when comparing to the average in the EU. These rates for Italy have increased moderately overtime, no more than 2 pp, demonstrating that the move from no-skilled to low and medium-skilled people is relatively slow.

The EU suffers from a shortage of ICT professional skills and it is expected that by 2015 there could be as many as 900 000 unfilled vacancies in Europe in this domain. New data on hard to fill vacancies shows that while it is a cross European problem, in some countries the issue is more severe than in others. In Italy, only 4% of enterprises recruited or tried to recruit ICT specialists in 2012, one of the lowest values in the EU27+, alongside Romania and Portugal, and half the EU average of 8%. A quarter of them (1% of firms) reported having difficulties recruiting such employees, which compares to 40% for the EU average. These very low figures highlight the low use of the internet in Italy by citizens and firms and therefore the low need for firms to hire ICT specialists. Given the productivity and growth advantages of ICT, they also highlight the missed opportunities for growth and employment in this large European country.
In the EU on average citizens have engaged in online shopping twice as much as Italians, indicating a low and yet not progressive take-up of e-Commerce in Italy. In 2012, only 17% of Italians purchased goods or services online within the last 12 months, well below the EU average of 45% and hardly changed since 2010. Italy also exhibits relatively low rates of cross-border e-commerce, with only 5% of the population having bought online from other EU countries, unchanged since last year and 5 pp. below the EU average. Online shopping from national sellers is equally small at 13%, which has remained unaltered since 2010 and is well below the EU average of 41%.

In 2012 Italy showed one of the lowest percentages of enterprises engaging in e-Commerce (4%, unchanged over 2010), with respect to an EU average of 14%. The same goes for SMEs: 4% engaged in e-Commerce in 2012 while the EU average was 13%. 14% of Italian companies purchased online in 2012 (up 3 p.p. over 2011), converging to the EU average which decreased from 19% in 2011 to 16% in 2012. The figure for enterprises' turnover achieved through e-Commerce in 2012 was 6%, well below the EU average of 15%.
In 2012, Italy had the lowest percentage of citizens who made use of the internet for eGovernment services (19%), a 3 p.p. decrease from 2011 and far below the EU27 average of 44%. Furthermore, only 8% sent filled-in forms, which compares with 22% for the EU27.

Also noteworthy is the fact that 84% of Italian enterprises are using the Internet for interaction with public authorities, close to the EU27 average of 87%.