



What the data tells us: Employer experience across Europe

Findings from the 2026 SkillsPULSE
Employer Survey

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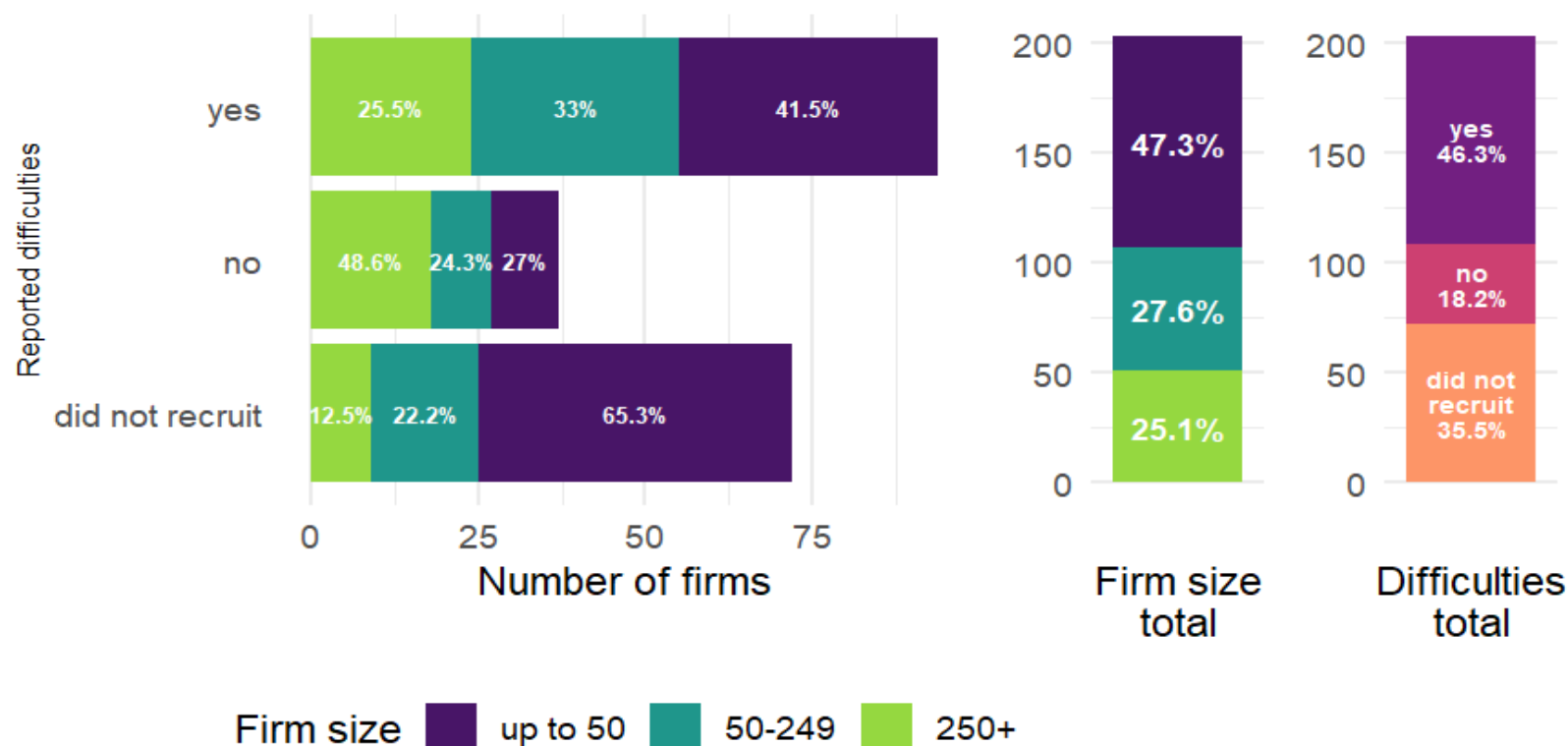
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- **Objective:**
 - Provide "high-resolution" skills intelligence to complement existing macro-level European data.
- **Addressing Data "One-Sidedness":**
 - Bridging the gap by collecting more detailed firm-level data to complement existing employee data
- **SME Focus:**
 - Targeted analysis of the SME ecosystem, often a "blind spot" in EU monitoring.
- **Data Profile:**
 - 395 firms from Finland, Greece, Italy, and Poland surveyed between January and March 2026.

- **High Activity, High Difficulty:**
 - 65% of Polish firms recruited recently; most reported hard-to-fill vacancies.
- **Size Matters:**
 - Large firms are more active recruiters but fill roles easier
- **Persistence:**
 - Hiring challenges are common among the surveyed recruiters

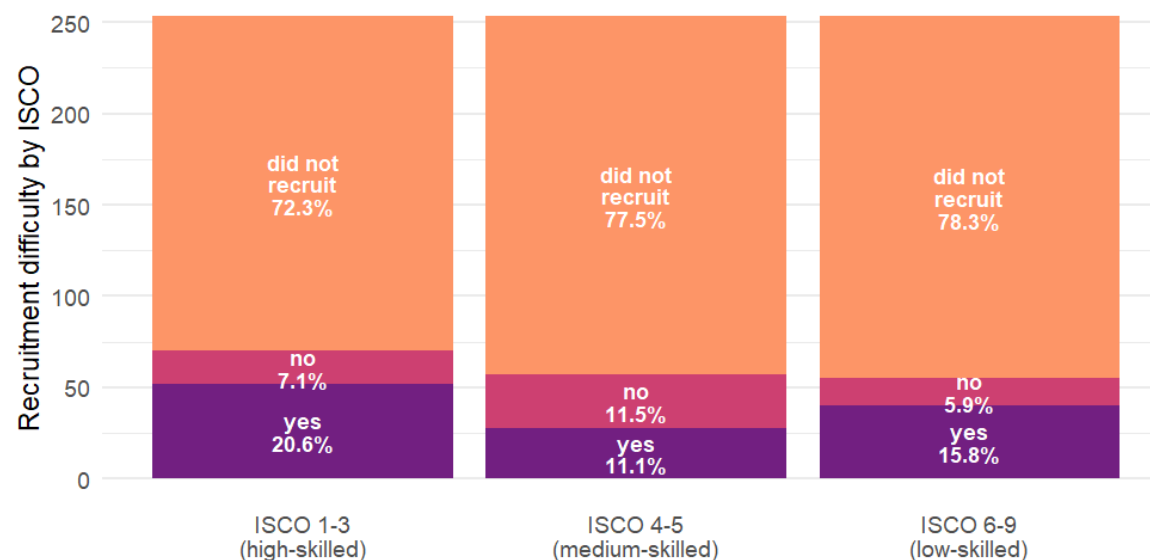
Figure 1. Polish firms experiencing difficulties in recruiting
1a. In any occupation



- **Market Participation:**
 - Small firms are more likely to not recruit (72%) than recruit (28%).
- **Small vs. Large:**
 - Small firms that do recruit report fewer difficulties than large firms.
 - Small firm recruitment is more focused on low-skilled employees.
- **Hardest Skills to Find:**
 - Specialist knowledge and organization-specific knowledge.

Figure 2. Difficulties in recruiting reported by **small (<50 employees) firms** in PL, GR, IT, FI

2a. By broad occupation groups



2b. Skills difficult to find (top 7)



- **Changing Workplaces, Changing Skills:**
 - Technological change and new working practices are the top two drivers of internal proficiency gaps.
- **Secondary Causes:**
 - Recruitment difficulties act as a compounding factor, especially for small firms.
- **The Performance Penalty:**
 - Over 43% of firms report negative impacts on operational performance.

Figure 3. Skill gaps in the workforce of **Polish** firms.

3a. Main reasons for employees lacking full proficiency

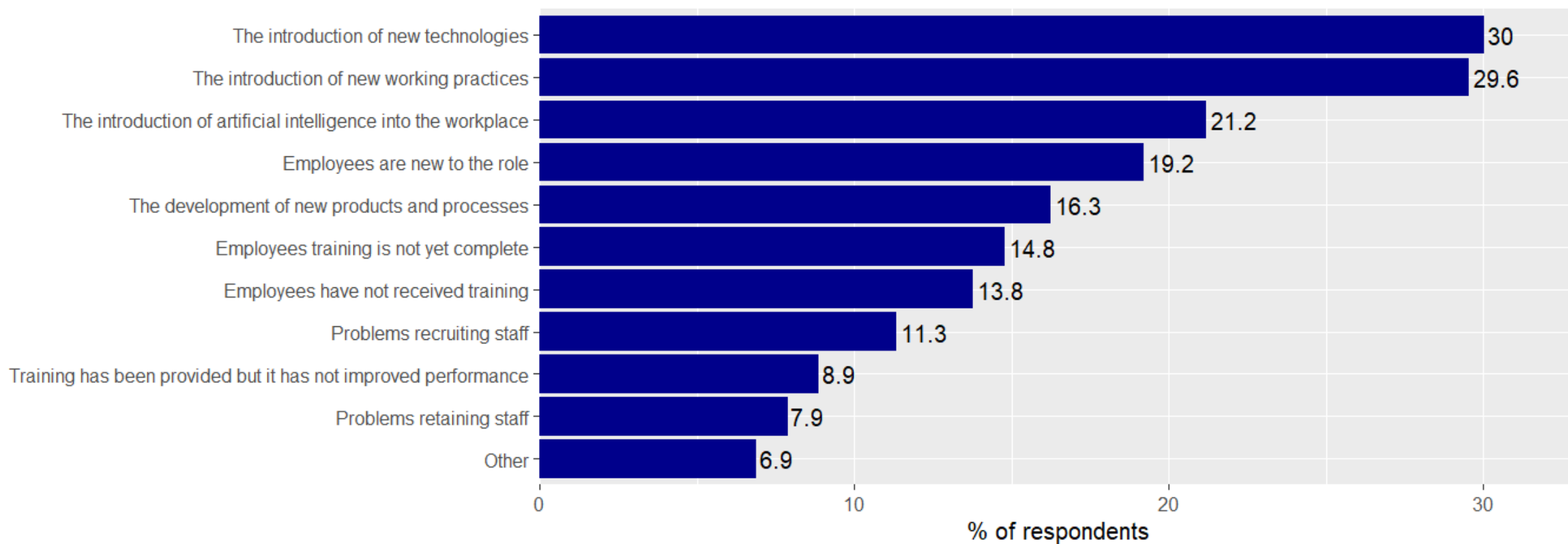
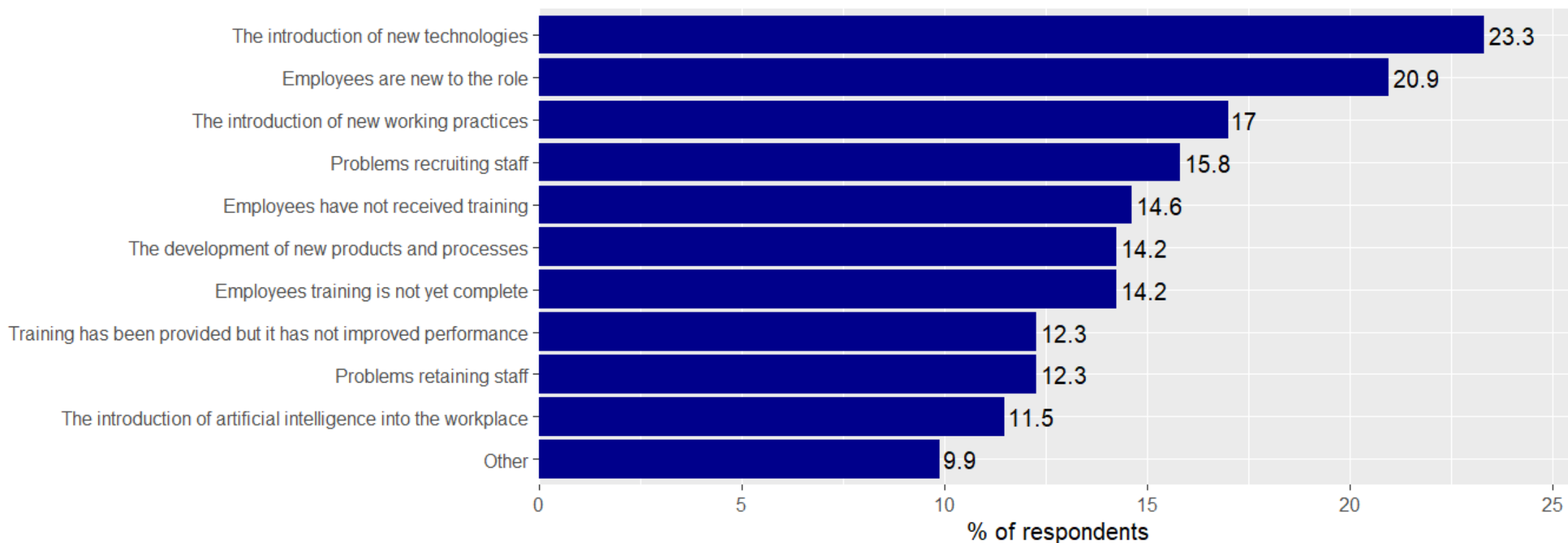


Figure 4. Skill gaps in the workforce of **small firms** (<50 employees) in PL, GR, IT, FI.

4a. Main reasons for employees lacking full proficiency



- **Universal Challenges:**
 - Problem-solving and specialist knowledge consistently rank as the top gap areas.
- **Interpersonal Skills:**
 - Social and teamworking skills are secondary gaps.
- **Least Reported:**
 - Basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Figure 3. Skill gaps in the workforce of Polish firms.

3b. Types of skills in which there are gaps

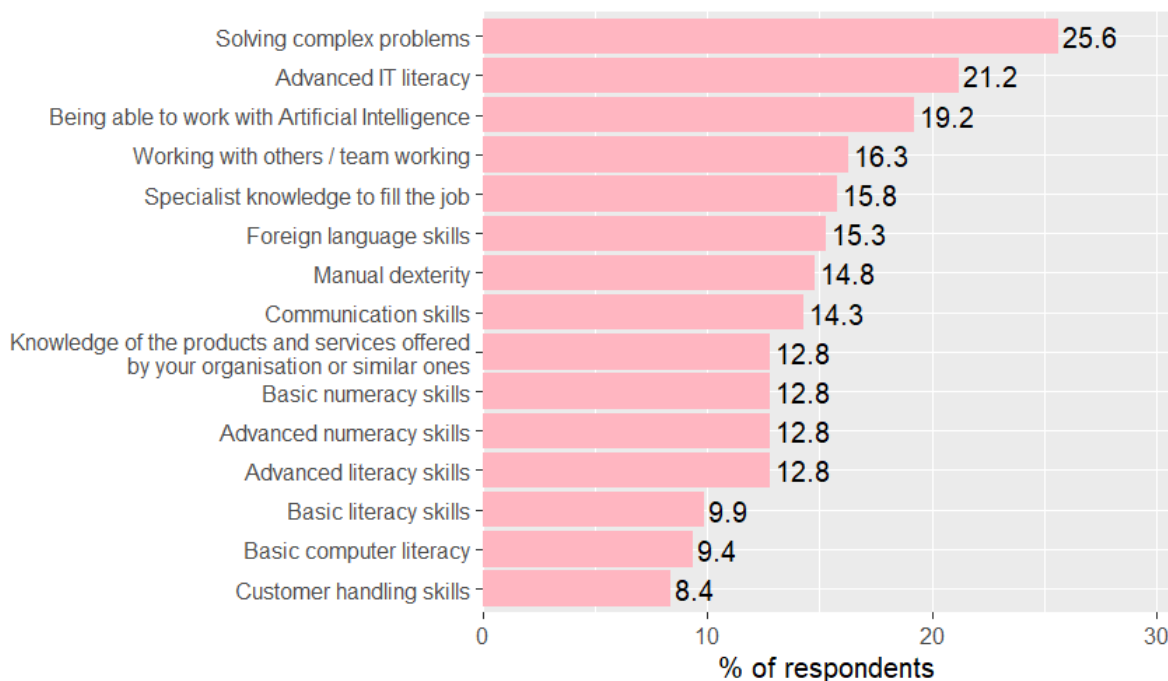
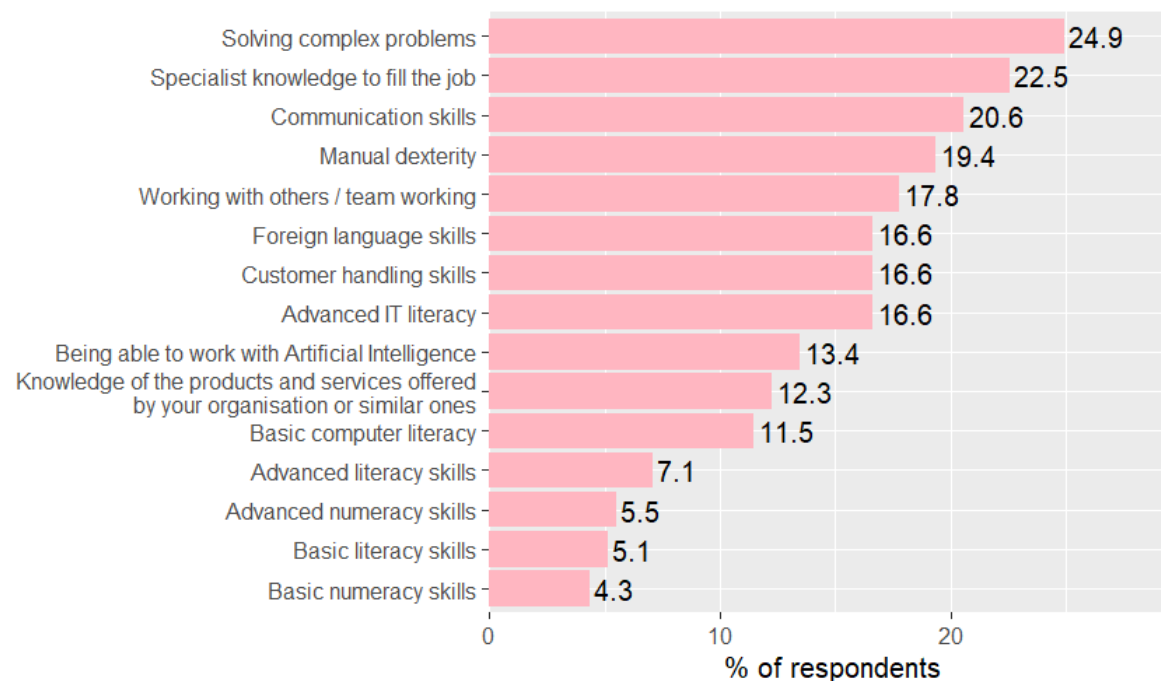


Figure 4. Skill gaps in the workforce of small firms (<50 employees) in PL, GR, IT, FI.

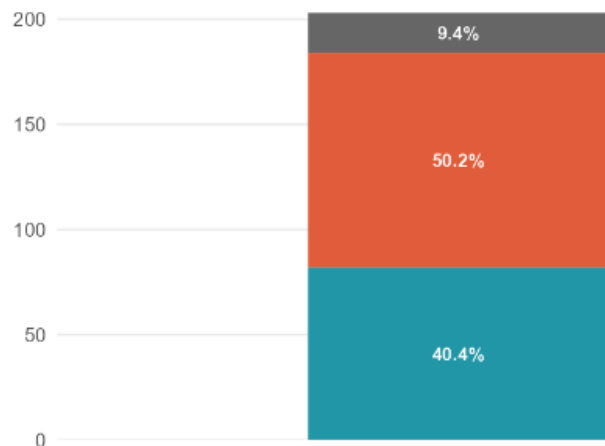
4b. Types of skills with gaps reported



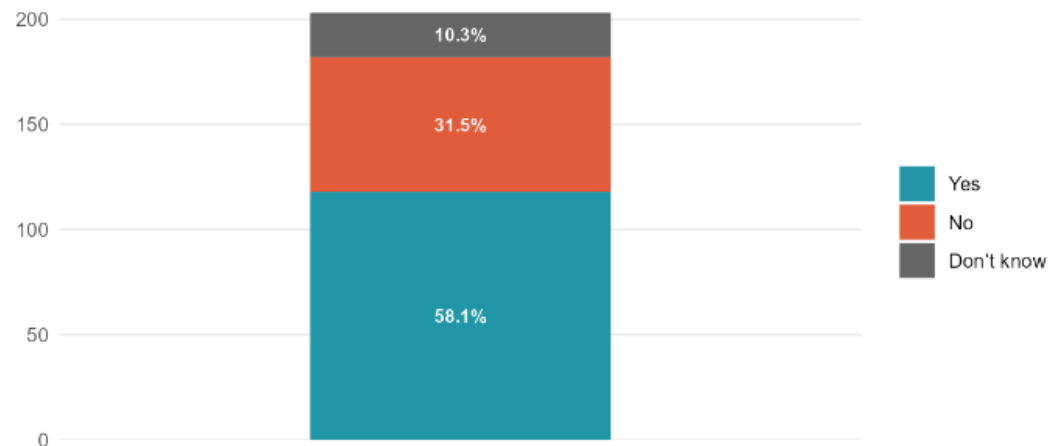
- **Tactical Reactions:**
 - Firms often increase supervision or change work practices rather than investing in strategic long-term training. Odd result?
- **Training Preferences:**
 - On-the-job training is the dominant method for small firms.
- **Motivation:**
 - Training is driven by immediate "current-job" operational needs.

*Figure 7. Training provision arranged or funded in the last 12 months in **Polish** firms.*

7a. Off-the-job training



7b. On-the-job training



B4e. Reasons for providing training

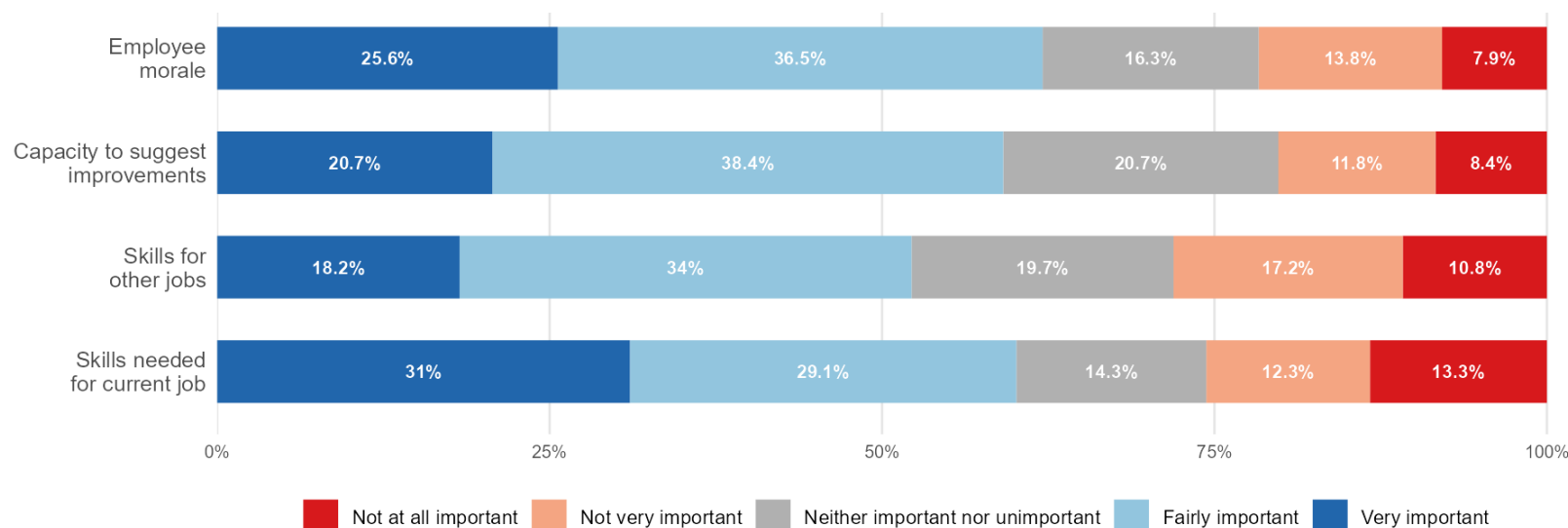
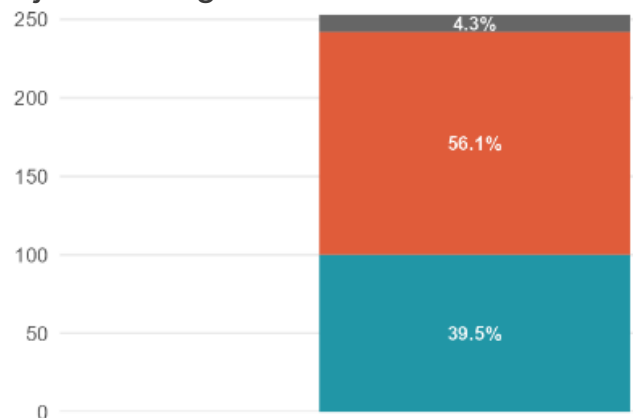
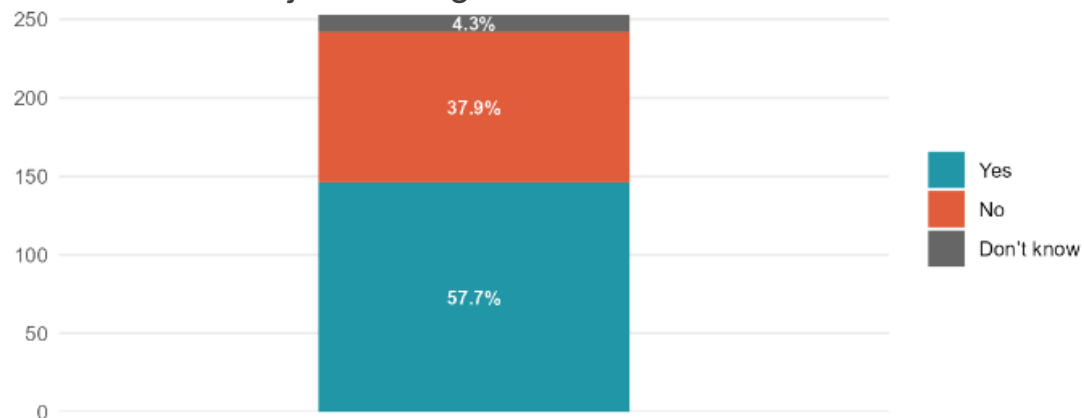


Figure 8. Training provision arranged or funded in the last 12 months in small firms (PL, GR, IT, FI).

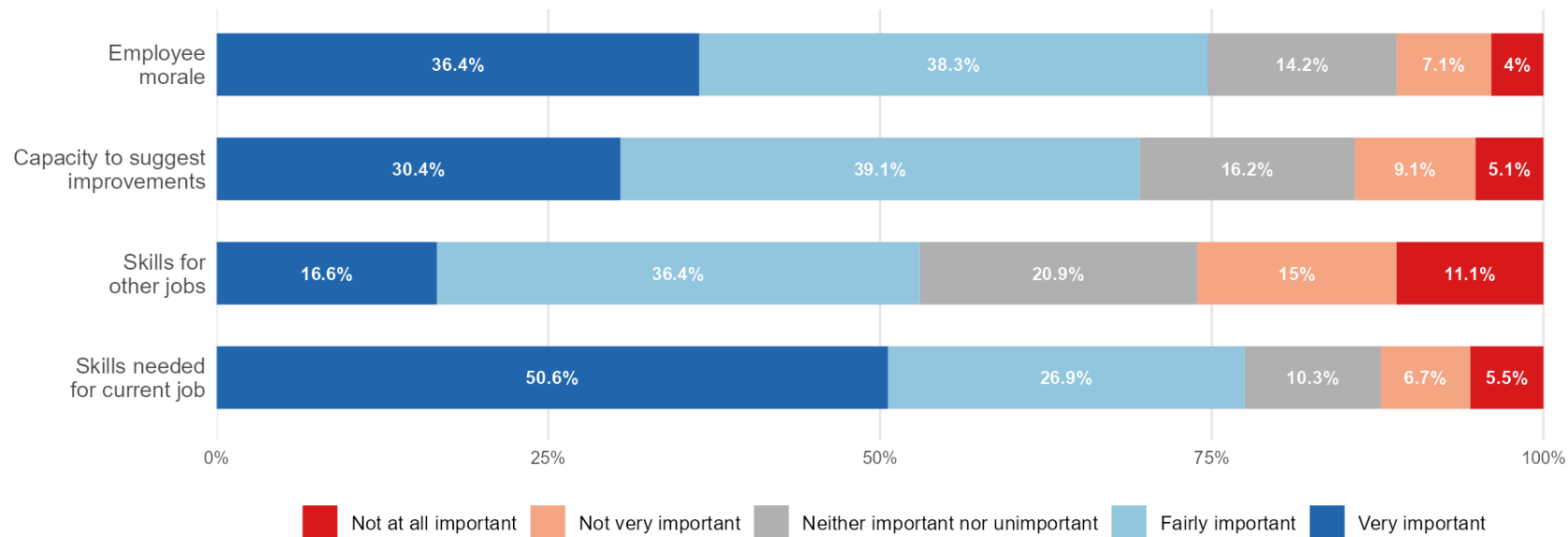
8a. Off-the-job training



8b. On-the-job training



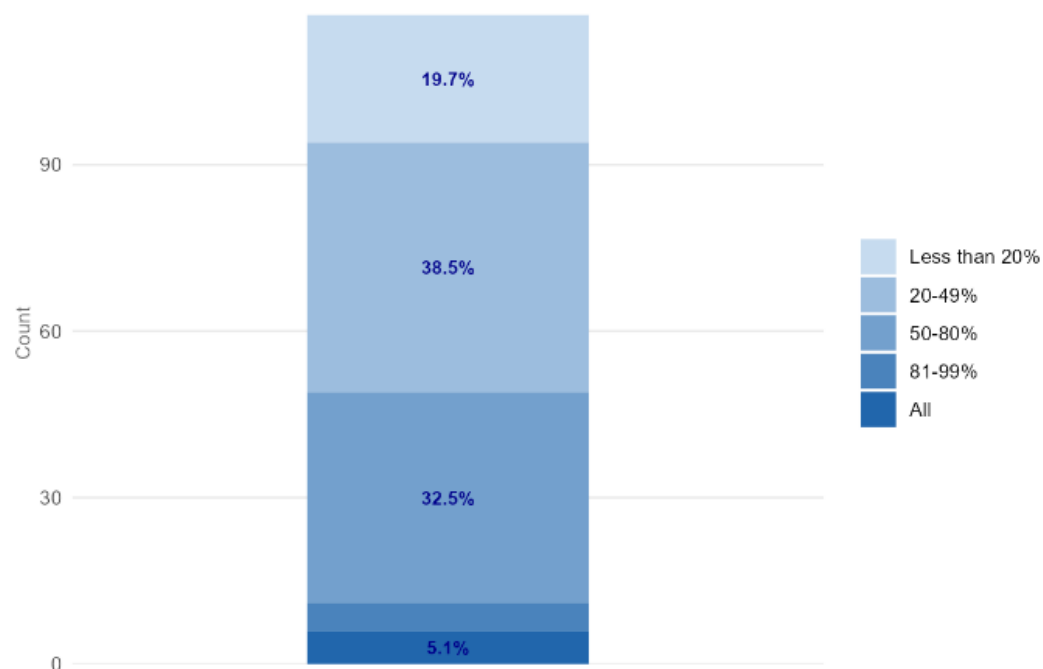
B4e. Reasons for providing training



- **Adoption Rates:**
 - AI use is widespread in Poland (only 32% non-adoption) but typically limited to a fraction of employees (20-49%).
- **Employee Receptiveness:**
 - 39–45% of small-firm managers report employee support of AI introduction.
- **Impact:**
 - Skill transformation is more common than total job substitution.

Figure 10. *The use and impact of AI in **Polish** establishments.*

10a. Share of workers using AI



10b. Impact of AI on employees

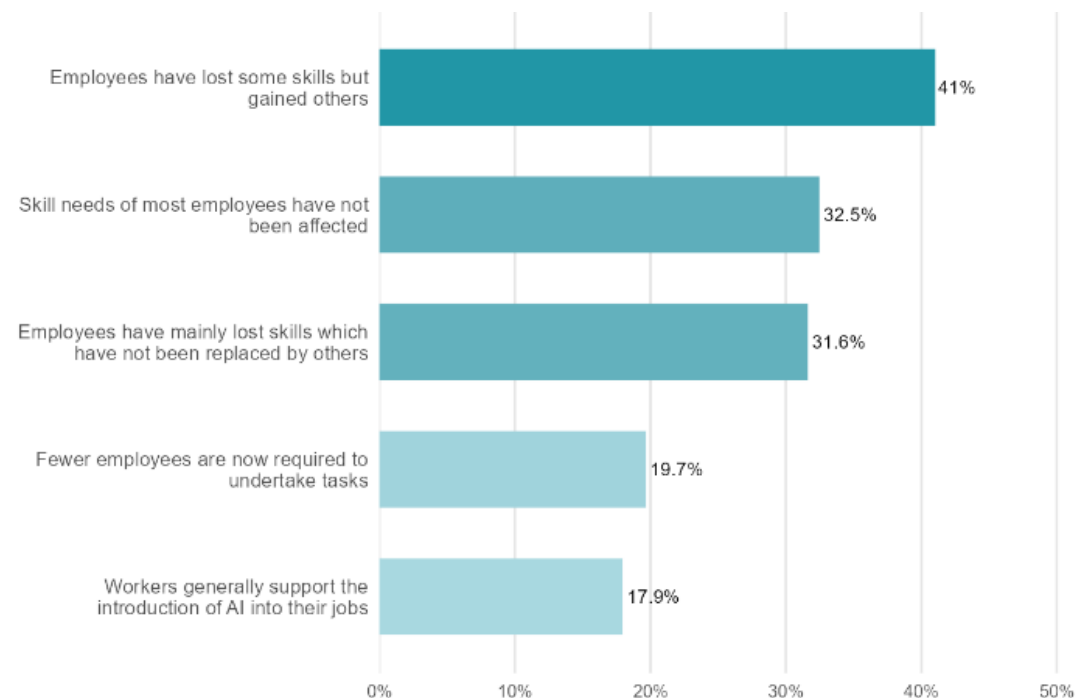
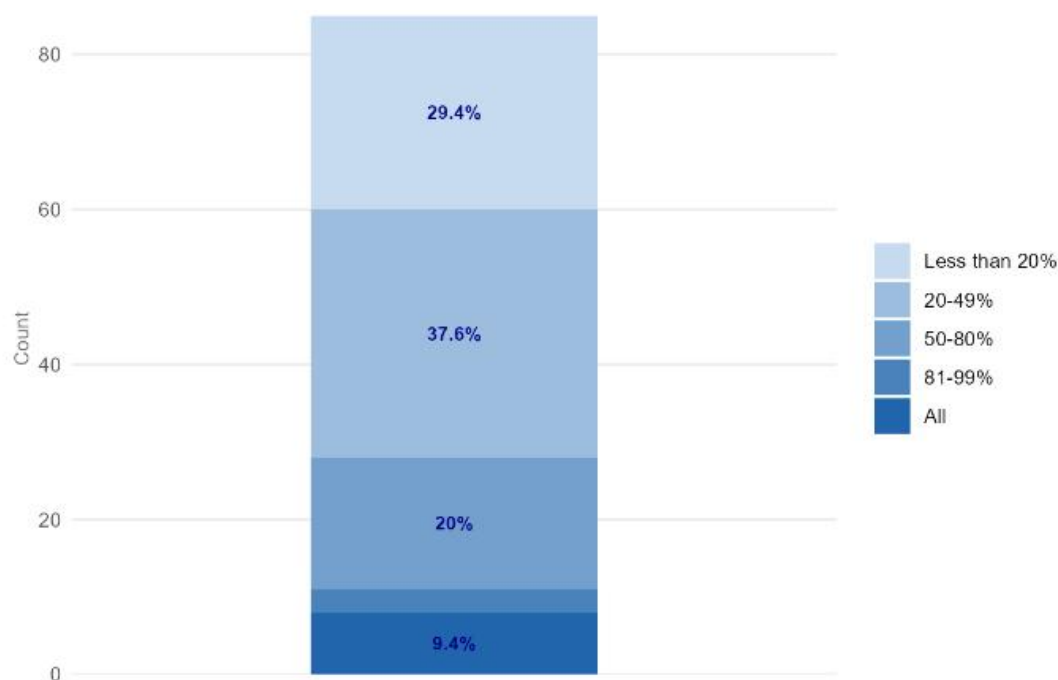
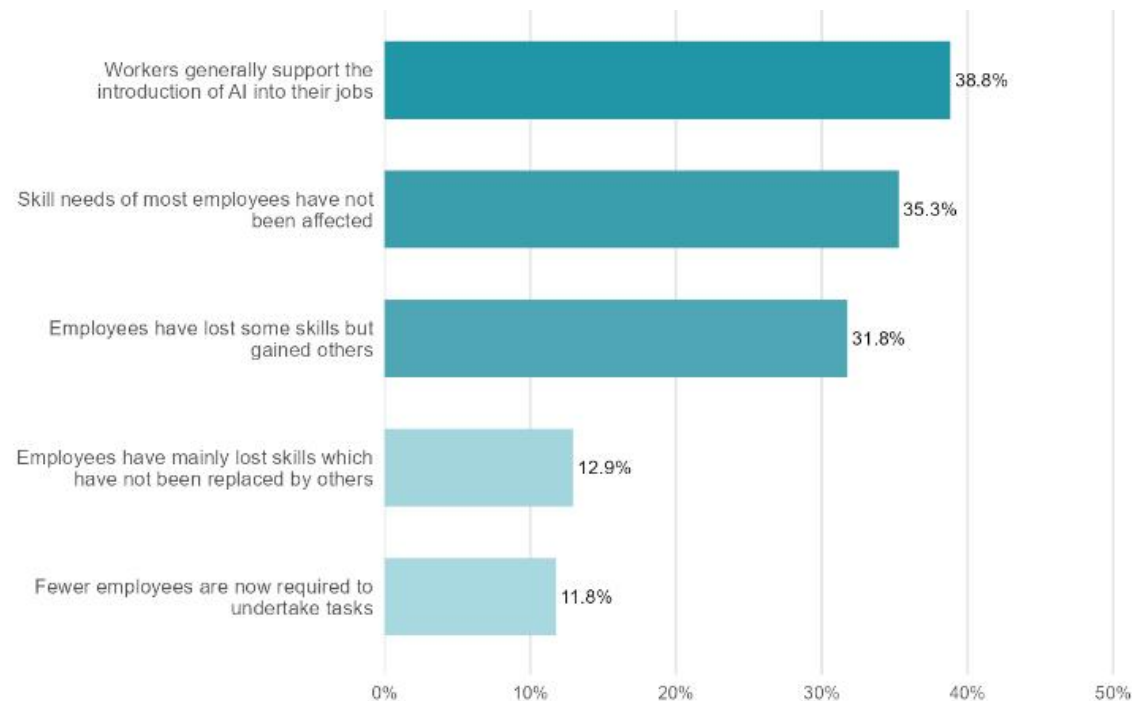


Figure 12. *The use and impact of AI in small firms (PL, GR, IT, FI).*

12a. Share of workers using AI



12b. Impact of AI on employees



- **Proof of Concept:**
 - The survey suggests that a harmonized EU-level employer survey is both feasible and highly useful.
- **Closing the Gap:**
 - Addressing external barriers like cost and the lack of relevant subject-area training. Especially relevant for SMEs—lack of proper monitoring.
- **The Path Forward:**
 - Using high-resolution data to navigate the digital and green transitions.



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