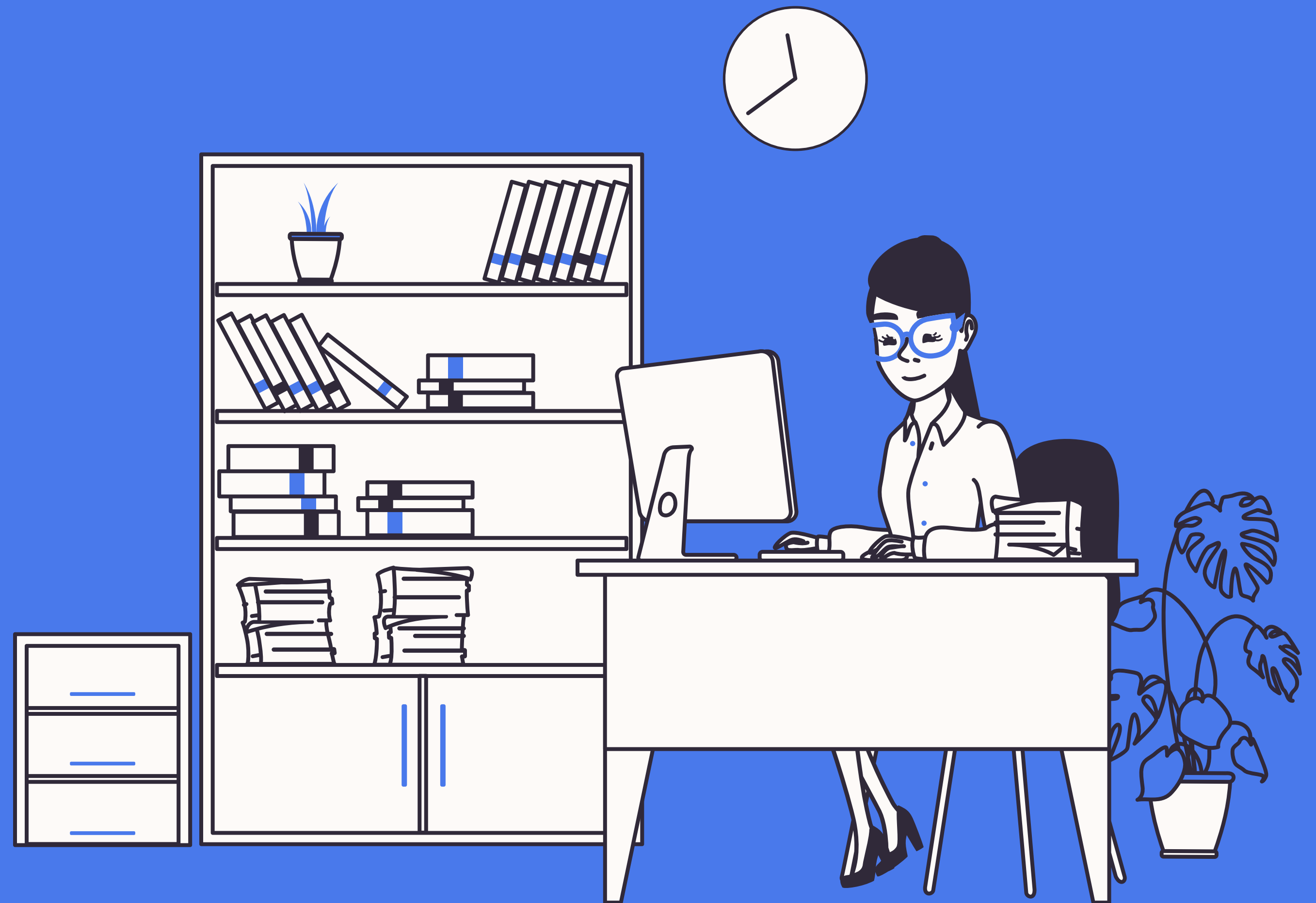


VET and Digitalisation: EU-level Analysis



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Introduction

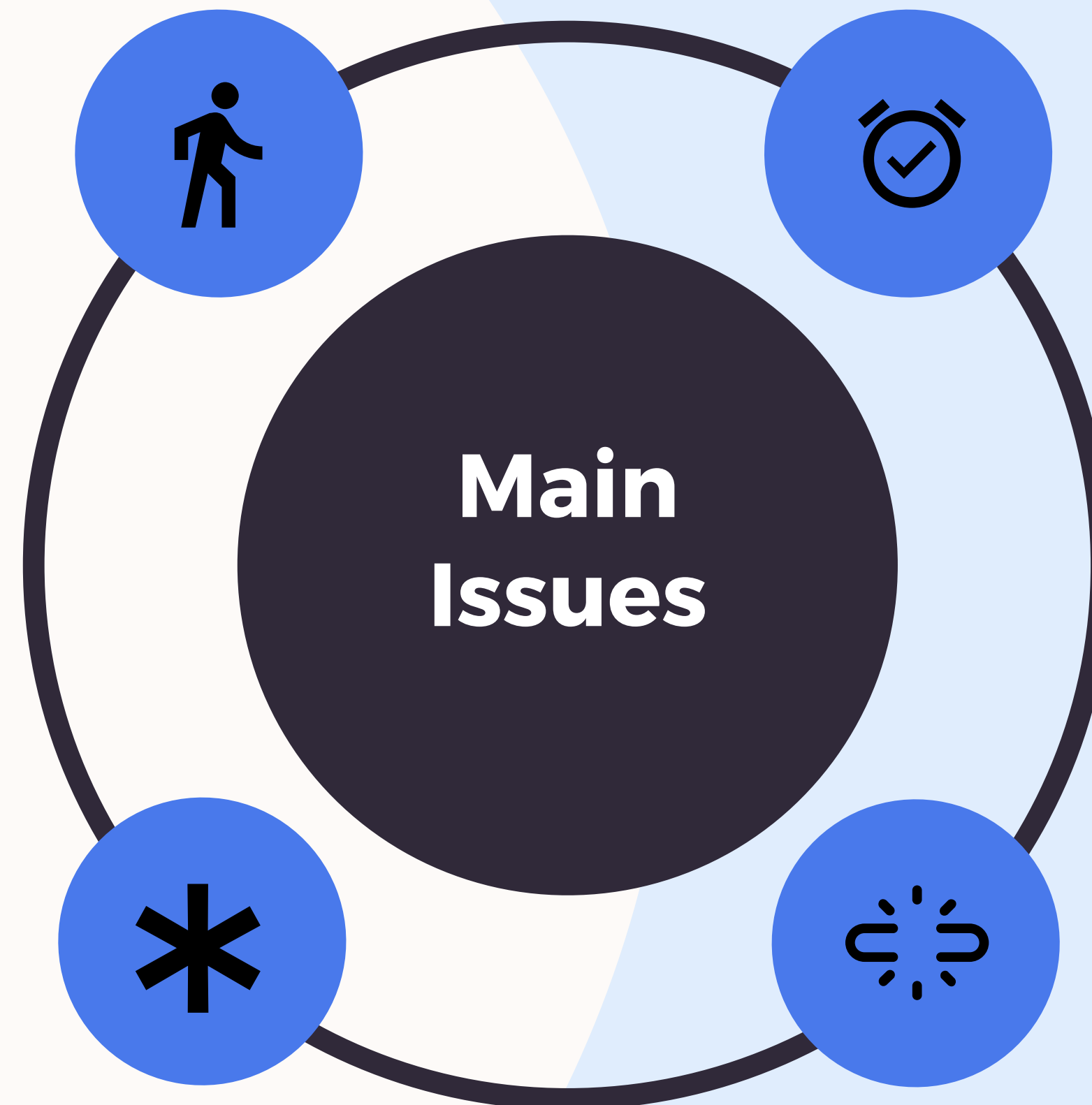
The COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on education and one of the main results was the dramatic increase of digital technology for educational purposes. The VET ecosystem suffered the digital transition more than other educational sectors for the following reasons:

Limited

use of ICT technologies among VET operators

Low

digital competencies & skills of VET operators



Insufficient

capacity for VET educators to manage digital classrooms

Logistical difficulties

due to the specific nature of VET education (manual and practical oriented).

Imbalances and main challenges

Europe faces great geographical imbalances in terms of digitalisation, as shown by the ranking in digitalisation of EU Member States elaborated by the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) of the European Commission (Exhibit 1).

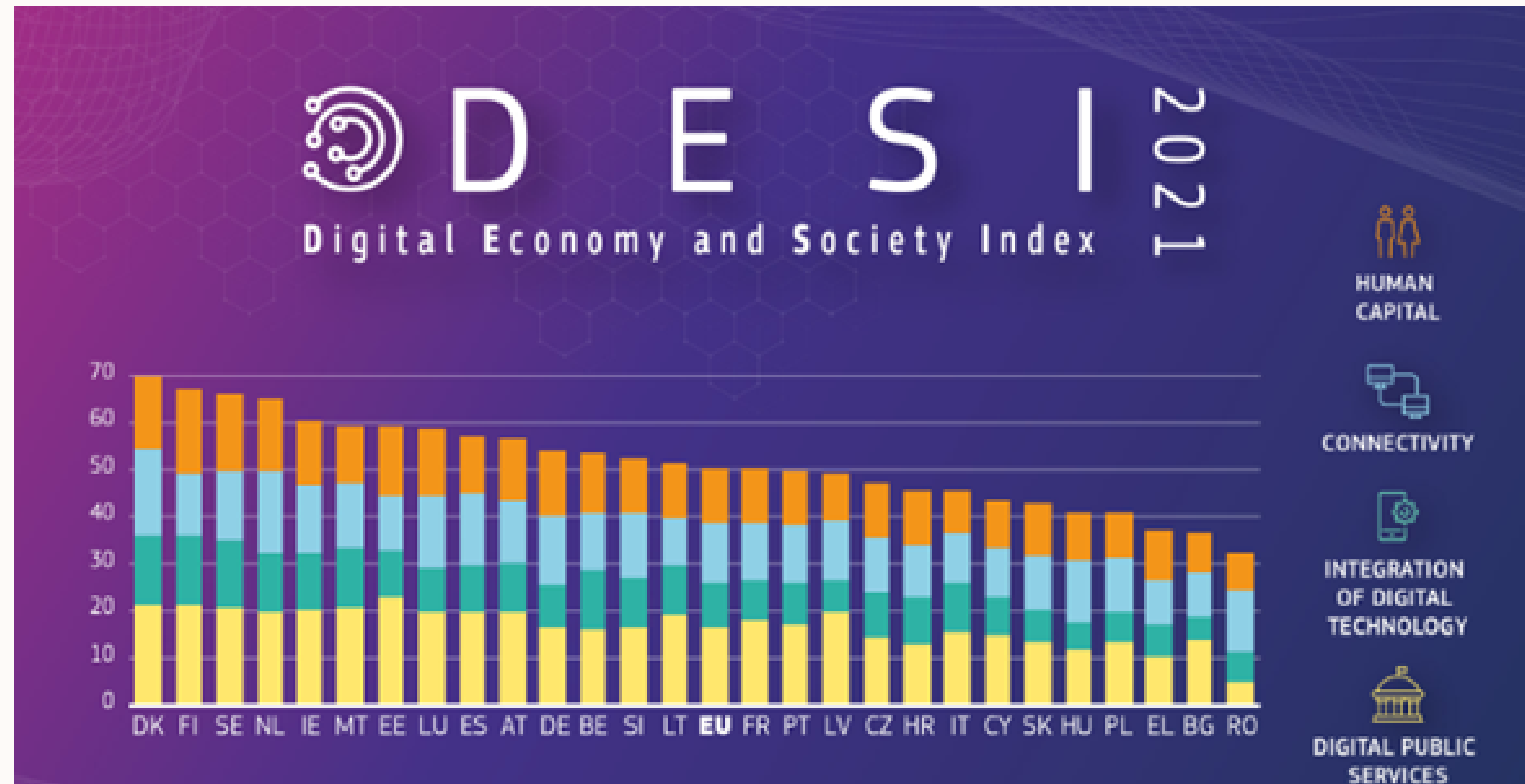


Exhibit 1 Digital Economy and Society Index for All Member States, 2021

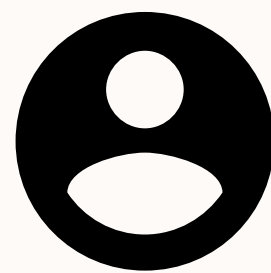
A joint study run by ILO, World Bank and UNESCO (2021) identified 3 main challenges for the VET sector in digital education:



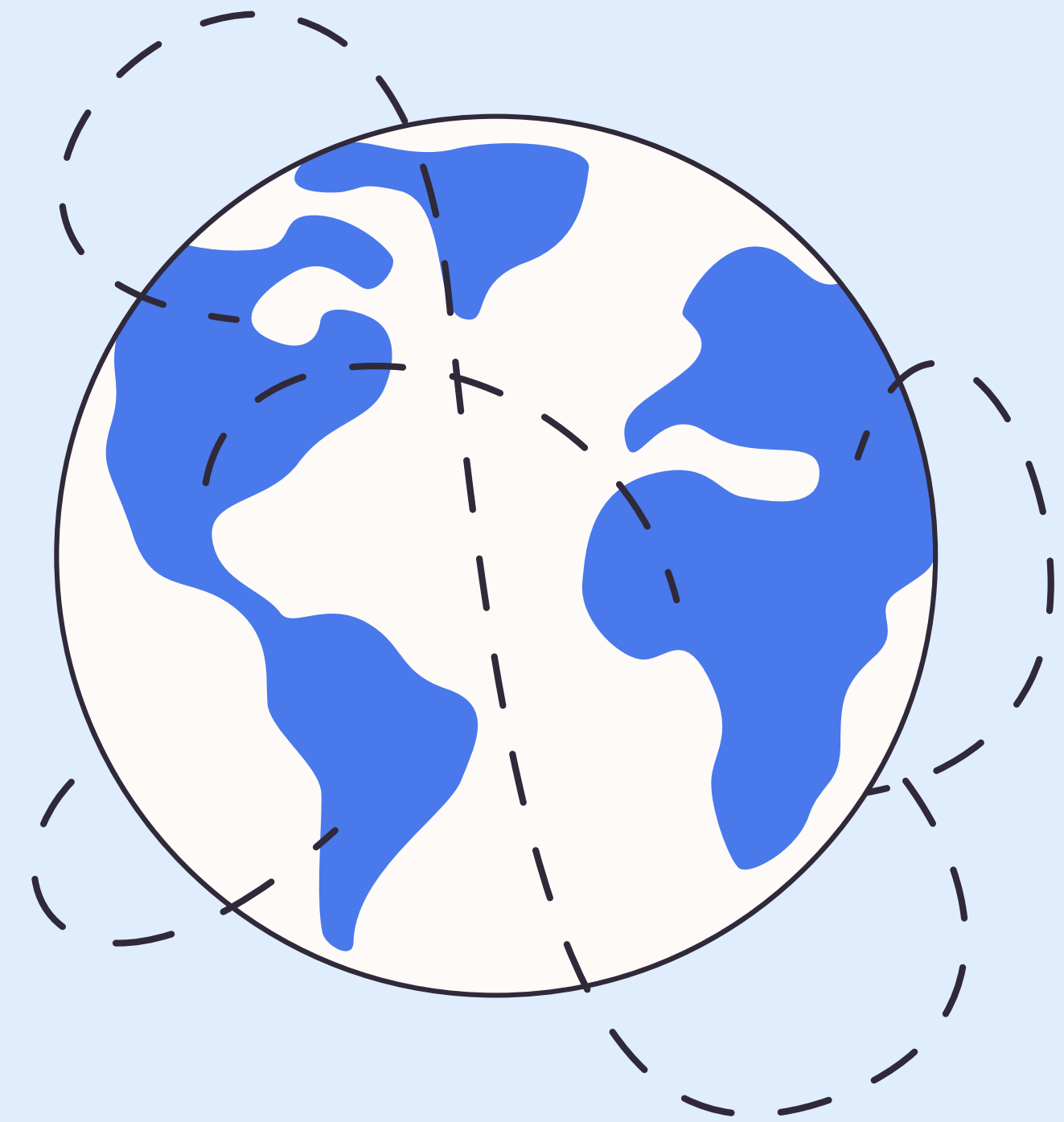
Lack of technological infrastructures. This refers to internet connection and no proper devices. In certain European countries, the main gap was between rural and urban areas.



No user-friendly digital tools. Due to its peculiarities, online teaching in VET sector was challenging.



Limited staff capacity in digital education. VET teachers had not sufficient digital literacy before the pandemic started.



Responses to challenges

and best practices

Several initiatives have been elaborated to facilitate the digital transition of VET education during the pandemic.

To the lack of technological infrastructures, some European member states supported vulnerable VET learners ensuring free internet access, translation of material in different languages, offering targeted trainings and monitoring the learners' participation in online classes (CEDEFOP, 2020).

The European Commission identified the initiative of the Greek and Romanian Ministry of Education as a best practice. In Greece, municipalities lent electronic equipment to disadvantaged students. In Romania, VET teachers and students obtained free access to online platforms for distance learners (European Commission, 2020).



Responses to challenges

and best practices

To the issue of lacking user-friendly distance learning platforms, some European Member states developed open educational resources, offering the possibility to exchange educational material for vocational courses (European Commission, 2020b). The European Commission (2020, 2020b) has identified two best practices:

- the platform elaborated by the Croatian Agency for VET and Adult Education <https://nastava.asoo.hr/>
- the online training facility eCollege supported by the Irish government <https://www.ecollege.ie/course/>

Responses to challenges

and best practices

∅ To the challenge of limited digital skills of staff, experts of the World Bank stated that only providing VET educators of digital tools is not enough to achieve a digital transformation in education (2021). Cultivation of digital skills and introduction of new technologies should be accompanied by other actions such as designing user-centred digital solutions, transforming teachers' perspectives on the use of technology, and regularly monitoring how technology is being used and what gaps need to be addressed.

A best practice identified by European Commission to support VET teachers in online classes is the didactical counselling for teachers who delivered classes remotely promoted by the Danish Ministry of Education (2020).

Conclusions

Despite the difficulties caused by the pandemic, different solutions have been adopted to support the VET ecosystem. The initiatives set up by EU member states have contributed to transform challenges in opportunities for the VET sector.



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