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The response of civil society organisations to face the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent restrictive measures adopted in Europe

STUDY



European Economic
and Social Committee



The response of civil society organisations to face the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent restrictive measures adopted in Europe

Study

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Foreword

By Séamus Boland

President of the Diversity Europe Group (October 2020 – April 2023)
European Economic and Social Committee



It is with great pleasure that I present this study, which was commissioned by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), at the request of the Diversity Europe Group.

In soliciting a review of how civil society organisations (CSOs) in Europe responded to the Covid-19 pandemic and on how they were impacted, our Group sought to address two significant and inter-related issues. Firstly, to raise awareness of the essential socio-economic role fulfilled by

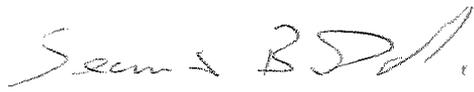
CSOs in their communities during this health crisis. Secondly, to reflect on the post Covid-19 civic space and on the types of societies and economies we wish to create.

As is clearly illustrated by the qualitative and quantitative results of this study, CSOs have acted as a bulwark at the local and community levels, providing incalculable assistance, notably in the provision of essential health and social care services. Working on behalf of or in addition to local authorities, CSOs applied their creativity, adaptability and energy to finding innovative solutions for the common good. The speed with which CSOs in European countries sprang into action and mustered community solidarity is truly impressive and illustrates the dedication of these organisations to the well-being of their communities! As the Group within the EESC which at the European level represents this breadth of CSOs, I considered it our duty to bring to light their prodigious contribution.

The second dimension that this study raises, relates to our European societies and communities post Covid. We are fortunate enough in Europe to be able to imagine our lives in the aftermath of this pandemic. However, with opportunities, there are also responsibilities. As representatives of European civil society, it will be our responsibility to participate in shaping this post Covid era and to making our communities more sustainable, resilient, equitable, productive and socially just, whilst also upholding the highest levels of democratic governance, respect for rights and the rule of law.

The ability to effectively carry out this role will depend on public and institutional support to rebuild and strengthen the capacities of CSOs, which as illustrated by this study, have been seriously undermined during the pandemic. Rendering European civil society more sustainable, involving them in the design and implementation of the Recovery Plan for Europe and helping them to redesign their own structures, should be the prerogative of all of us. In this context, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many Members of the Diversity Europe Group, who directly contributed to this study.

Ultimately, the Covid-19 pandemic has taught us one fundamental lesson: we need and are reliant on a well-functioning civil society. A civil society that can innovate, take ownership and drive community resilience. What remains to be seen, is the extent to which the positive legacies of this health crisis, such as greater respect for care, wellbeing and community goods, as well as increased mutual solidarity, will outlive the pandemic. This belongs to the future and that future belongs to all of us!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Seamus Boland'.

Séamus Boland

President of the Diversity Europe Group

Abstract

As the COVID-19 pandemic hits societies and economies, bringing a global and unprecedented public health and social crisis, civil society organisations (CSOs) are responding by providing frontline help and defending the rights of people across the world. At the same time, CSOs have faced themselves profound impacts that may harm their capacities to continue playing their central roles in delivering services, advocating for rights and protecting the most fragile, while safeguarding participatory democracy and civic debate in the near future.

In this context, the present study commissioned by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) at the request of the Diversity Europe Group has a twofold goal: 1) to shed light on the effects of the pandemic and the measures put in place by European countries to contain the virus spread on CSOs and their activities; 2) to collect quantitative and qualitative relevant information about the reactions of CSOs across Europe, through a mixed method combining desk search and the administration of an in-depth online survey of the EESC Diversity Group members, as well as similar CSOs as per scope and mission.

The resulting mapping of new and adapted services and initiatives carried out by the CSOs participating in the study, triangulated with the findings of several recent studies and reports, allows for a thorough understanding of the main challenges faced by the CSOs and their members and users, as well as the enormous contribution made by CSOs in helping to cope with the consequences of the pandemic. Moreover, the study highlights key topics, such as the lack of stable funding streams, legal frameworks and adequate resources and skillsets to take full advantage of the ongoing digital transformation while leaving no one behind, which will require future reflection and bold political decisions to make sure that CSOs' capacities are maintained and strengthened in the post-COVID-19 recovery phase.

Executive summary

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a profound impact on civil society and its organized forms. According to the EESC¹, civil society is a collective term for all types of social action, by individuals or groups, that do not emanate from the state and are not run by it and the uniqueness of this concept is its dynamic nature, that creates an opportunity to strengthen confidence in the democratic system, favouring the climate for reform and innovation.

It is broadly recognized that Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) were some of the frontrunners supporting populations and organisations in Europe during the first wave of the pandemic, but they were and are still also impacted by the consequent restrictive measures adopted in many countries.

The twofold aim of this commissioned study is to (1) map the responses of European CSOs to the COVID-19 crisis in order to identify their inputs and contributions and learn from possible shortcomings and (2) to outline major consequences and challenges for CSOs in the aftermath of the crisis.

The methodology adopted by the authors relies on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. The main presented findings are based on an online survey developed and disseminated between the end of August and October 2020, that gathered 112 eligible and meaningful contributions from EESC Diversity Group members and other CSOs across Europe.

The geographical coverage of respondents is also very positive, as 26 out of the current 27 European Union countries, plus additional European (outside the European Union) countries participated with relevant contributions to this study. Nevertheless, it is important to stress the specific focus of the study on CSOs belonging to the EESC Diversity Europe Group and others deemed similar for their purposes and missions, thus the findings cannot be considered as representative for the whole community of European CSOs. It is also important, from a methodological point of view, to highlight the choice made by the commissioning EESC Group to follow a thematic and content-based approach, rather than by sector and by country, thus bringing as a result a mapping of new or adapted initiatives put in place by the study participants across the six EESC categories (Associational Life - Consumers and Environment – Farmers – Liberal Professions - SMEs crafts and family business - Social Economy). Consequently, the resulting mapping reflects the variety of sectors, sizes and scopes of such categories which is an inherent characteristic of the Diversity Europe Group itself.

Though, a wide range of types of stakeholders and respective interests are represented among the members and/or the target groups of the CSOs in the sample, with a predominance of groups in vulnerable contexts or conditions, which makes sense as such groups have been indeed among the most affected by the sudden implementation of the restrictive measures to combat the spread of the virus and in many cases have been hit by the closure of publicly provided services they were heavily relying upon. The CSOs that responded are distributed throughout the 6 main categories of activity acknowledged by Group III of EESC and mentioned above, with a higher predominance of those involved in Associational Life and Social Economy.

In addition to the survey, an extensive desk research was performed, mainly to allow varied sources of information and opinions on the areas where less representation was gathered from the consultation.

The results of the survey spot interesting lights on two main types of challenges: first, the societal challenges that the CSOs participating in the study have observed as the most pressing issues the

¹ EESC (1999), The Civil Society organized at European level. Proceedings of the First Convention Brussels, 15 and 16 October 1999. Available at: https://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/actes_sco_en.pdf.

pandemic raised in the society and they helped tackle; and second, those organizational, economic and political challenges the CSOs found themselves to face with as consequences of the emergency state declared in most of the countries.

The main societal challenges that the members and groups targeted by the CSOs consulted have been confronted with are: the interruption of essential services during the lockdown, with specific emphasis on the disruption of several health and care services; the sharp increase of people in vulnerable socio-economic situations due to job loss, sharpened inequalities and impoverishment; the accentuation of discrimination phenomena such as ageism; the lack of protection against domestic violence; the worsened conditions of people suffering from intellectual, mental, physical and learning disabilities; the effects of digital divide, digital illiteracy and correlated inequalities in access and capacity to take advantage of the remote opportunities for learning, working and service provision across the population; the threats posed by the pandemic on food supply and agricultural workforce shrinking in several regions; and, overall, the disruption of economic activities having a heavy impact on SMEs and liberal professions, and more in general, on trade relations and consumers' habits.

On a different perspective, the main challenges for the CSOs' operations and mission included the leapfrog shift to telework and the varied degree of preparedness of CSOs to adapt to it depending on their size, structure and types of services offered, which in some cases was affected by the low digital literacy of workers and users and the lack of appropriate digital tools, equipment and infrastructure; the sudden increase of the demand for basic services such as shelters, food, protection equipment, etc. in their communities, as well as the interruption of many health and social care services that in several regions CSOs are traditionally providing in conjunction to or on behalf of the public authorities; the need to keep their informative services up and running and in many cases also reinforce them due to the huge increase of requests for clear, up-to-date and easy-to-access information about the pandemic evolution, the restrictions, and the extraordinary services and aids put in place. In addition, although to different extents, CSOs have had to face reduction in donations, impossibility to arrange fund-raising events or have decided to waive their association fees to their members struggling with the economic crisis. This, coupled with the interruption of many non-essential projects, activities and services that were in the past an important revenue source for them, has meant for many a considerable shrinking in economic resources.

Departing from these challenges, the impacts perceived by the CSOs, on the economic and organizational perspectives are reported and debriefed. As one of the major conclusions, several CSOs across Europe are calling the attention of European institutions on the financing difficulties they are facing and will likely continue to undermine their capacity to fulfil their mission in the aftermath of the crisis. Consistently with this, 33% of the respondents stated that the CSOs they represent have seen their operations strongly affected by COVID-19, 30% of them expect lower revenues in 2020 than in 2019, and 42% incurred higher costs for either the rise in demand for their services or the need to invest in IT or physical equipment to adapt facilities.

In response to the pandemic and the containment measures, 101 out of the 112 participants presented newly launched or adapted initiatives which witness the breadth of coverage and swift capacity to adapt demonstrated by the CSOs as well as their main concerns for the near future and for their further work and participation in society. These aspects are mapped per EESC category of activity and analysed in detail in this report. Namely, the mapping findings are based on the responses received from: 42 CSOs

that recognized themselves as either belonging to (for the EESC members) or assimilable (for the non EESC members) to the “Associational Life” category, 9 from “Consumers and Environment”, 9 from “Farmers”, 6 from “Liberal Professions”, 3 from “SMEs, Crafts and Family Business”, 24 from “Social Economy” and 8 from other categories.

Lastly, a catalogue of some of those successful initiatives is also presented in Annex 3, as a rich collection of examples of the varied and complex interventions of organized civil society during the pandemic.

In terms of next steps to the work developed, two main themes were clustered as relevant for deeper analysis and for future reflections: the threats to the future role of CSOs in participatory democracy and their capacity to advocate for human and basic rights; the challenges that could hamper the CSOs’ ability to recover from the crisis and be sustainable over time imperilling their capacity to protect the most fragile from social exclusion and poverty.

Building on these reflections and also on the main conclusions retrieved and clustered per area of activity of the CSOs involved in the study, six main areas of recommendations are further elaborated. In summary, the study offers solid basis to argument the necessity that in the post-COVID-19 recovery, both European institutions and national and regional governments, concentrate their political efforts and financial resources to:

- Foster and encourage new solidarity and new form of social activism while promoting links and cross-fertilisation mechanisms between newly emerged groups and established CSOs.
- Tackle the risks and take advantage of the opportunities brought by digitalization.
- Promote youth engagement and innovative programmes to encourage job creation linked to civic action.
- Equip CSOs with the needed skills and resources to take the most advantage from networking, national and international cooperation.
- Relieve bureaucracy and administrative burdens.
- Engage CSOs in the design of climate- and environment-friendly recovery plans.

With this overall framework, the main picture emerging from the study is the essential role of CSOs to the next recovery period and the need to reinforce their capability and sustainability towards the promotion of a fairer, more equal and sustainable society. This makes it even more important to secure mechanisms for governments’ accountability and open and transparent decision-making processes, allowing CSOs to keep their role of vigilant actors, safeguarding rights and nurturing an open civic space, which is the utmost condition for lively democracies to progress.

1. Introduction

The area of play of the present study concerns the reaction of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to the COVID-19 pandemic and to the consequent measures adopted in Europe. To this purpose the study authors adopt as guidance definition of “civil society” the one emanating from the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)², “Civil society is a collective term for all types of social action, by individuals or groups, that do not emanate from the state and are not run by it. What is particular to the concept of civil society is its dynamic nature, the fact that it denotes both situation and action. The participatory model of civil society also provides an opportunity to strengthen confidence in the democratic system so that a more favourable climate for reform and innovation can develop”.

The World Bank has a concordant definition, conceptualising civil society as “the wide array of non-governmental and not for profit organizations that have a presence in public life, express the interests and values of their members and others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations”³. Similarly, UNDP has stated that the “Civil society is an arena of voluntary collective actions around shared interests, purposes and values distinct from families, state and profit seeking institutions. The term civil society includes the full range of formal and informal organizations that are outside the state and the market – including social movements, volunteer involving organizations, mass-based membership organizations, faith-based groups, NGOs, and community-based organizations, as well as communities and citizens acting individually and collectively.”⁴

Based on this concept of civil society, the EESC defines CSOs as in abstract terms as the sum of all organisational structures whose members have objectives and responsibilities that are of general interest and who also act as mediators between the public authorities and citizens. Their effectiveness is crucially dependent on the extent to which their players are prepared to help achieve consensus through public and democratic debate and to accept the outcome of a democratic policy-making process.

In this frame, the EESC Diversity Europe Group (Group III) plays an essential role, as it includes “representatives and stakeholders of civil society, particularly in the economic, civic, professional and cultural field”, such as “farmers' organisations, small businesses, the crafts sector, the professions, social economy actors (mutualities, cooperatives, foundations and non-profit associations), consumer organisations, environmental organisations, and associations representing the family, women's and gender equality issues, youth, minority and underprivileged groups, persons with disabilities, the voluntary sector and the medical, legal, scientific and academic communities”⁵,... The main aim of this group is to achieve actual economic, social and participatory democracy in the European Union (EU), through a triple-based set of objectives:

Diversity in democracy: at the 1295th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies on 27 September 2017, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a set of guidelines⁶ for civil participation in political decision making, underlining the centrality of citizens' participation to democracy, which is in

² EESC (2020), Participatory Democracy. A success story written by the EESC. Available at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/qe-04-19-663-en-n.pdf>.

³ The World Bank (2007), Consultations with Civil Society. A Sourcebook, Working Document produced by the World Bank Civil Society Team, February 2007. Available at: https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/Civil%20Society/cso_documents/ConsultationsSourcebook_Feb2007.pdf.

⁴ UNDP (2009), Voice and Accountability for Human Development: A UNDP Global Strategy to Strengthen Civil Society and Civic Engagement. Available at: https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/civil_society/voice_and_accountabilityforhumandevlopment.html.

⁵ EESC website: Diversity Europe - Group III: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/members-groups/groups/diversity-europe-group-iii>.

⁶ Council of Europe (2017), Guidelines for civil participation in political decision making (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 27 September 2017 at the 1295th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies), CM(2017)83-final. Available at: https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016807509dd.

turn essential to protect European values in light of the growingly spread of populism that makes evident the polarization of society and the need to put in place or strengthen effective mechanisms to preserve democracy across Europe.

Consensus building: it is of utmost important to preserve and reinforce the role of CSOs as intermediaries in many economic and societal contexts, whereas the active participation of civil society proves to help find common grounds and advance the diverse interests of counterparts.

European civic engagement - local action: organised groups exist to highlight the needs of their members and for the benefit of wider society; therefore, they act as a key channel of participation and multiplier for the engagement of citizens⁷. In a complex social landscape, challenges are massive and require unprecedented resource mobilisation. This can be achieved only working in a cross-sectoral and multi-disciplinary manner in order to identify solutions. Organised civil society is a catalyst for social innovation, a movement which has contributed to design welfare systems resulting in new policies, structures, products, services and working methods. The participation of civil society is needed now more than ever – but true social innovation only happens when organised civil society is involved⁸.

As it can be perceived from its objectives, the Group III of the EESC has a broad and inclusive mission, which is reinforced by the fact that it includes organisations representing social and economic players that are not social partners in the strict sense of the term (which are represented under the umbrella of Group I and II, respectively gathering the Employers and the Workers), such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations and religious communities.

Even before the advent of the health, social and economic crisis brought into the scene by the spread of coronavirus Sars-COV-2, CSOs were facing a number of barriers preventing them to fulfil their role in the society, as decision makers were in some cases reluctant to engage with civil society⁹.

Notable progresses were made in the last years, which have seen the remarkable rise of civil society as a global phenomenon and its increased influence in sectors such as international affairs and development,¹⁰ as well as health policy making and care service delivery¹¹. Nevertheless, governmental institutions across Europe still lack full capacity to harness the democratizing potential of civil society consultation and engagement.¹²

Fewer funding opportunities and decreased financing from private and public donors for certain activities and areas aggravate this scenario: CSOs themselves are among the victims of inequalities and weaknesses in the system, as they witness a shrinking in their space for action and influence. As the EESC highlighted in their recent proposals for post-COVID-19 crisis reconstruction and recovery, “the current and future ability of CSOs to respond to needs is threatened by often scarce and fluctuating resources”. This poses the urgent necessity of ensuring reliable funding mechanisms for CSOs.

⁷ Council of Europe (2019), Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-making Process, adopted by the Conference of INGOs on 30 October 2019. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/code-of-good-practice-civil-participation-revised-301019-en/168098b0e2>

⁸ EESC (2020), RESOLUTION on “EESC proposals for post-COVID-19 crisis reconstruction and recovery: “The EU must be guided by the principle of being considered a community of common destiny.” adopted by the European Economic and Social Committee on 11 June 2020. Available at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/documents/resolution/eesc-proposals-post-covid-19-crisis-reconstruction-and-recovery-eu-must-be-guided-principle-being-considered-community#downloads>.

⁹ Steffek, Jens & Kissling, Claudia & Nanz, Patrizia. (2008). Civil Society Participation in European and Global Governance. A Cure for the Democratic Deficit?. 10.1057/9780230592506.

¹⁰ European Commission (2017), Report on engagement with civil society, Staff Working Document SWD(2017) 136/2. Available at: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8341-2017-REV-1/en/pdf>.

¹¹ European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies (2017), Civil Society and Health. Contributions and Potential, Edited by Scott L. Greer Matthias Wismar Gabriele Pastorino Monika Kosinska, ISBN 978 92 890 5043 2. Available at: https://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/349526/Civil-society-web-back-cover-updated.pdf?ua=1.

¹² Steffek, Jens & Kissling, Claudia & Nanz, Patrizia. (2008). Civil Society Participation in European and Global Governance. A Cure for the Democratic Deficit?. 10.1057/9780230592506.

Furthermore, growing administrative hurdles and the redirection of funding towards certain CSOs and government-sponsored NGOs¹³ pose considerable obstacles to their work across the EU and beyond. Today, with many countries facing the second COVID-19 wave and a worryingly sharp increase of cases and hospitalizations that are putting under renovated pressure healthcare and welfare systems, such as Spain and France, governments and organisations at all levels (international, national, regional, municipal) are in urgent need of information to support their decision-making to manage the health, social and economic crises brought about by COVID-19 outbreaks. Even more, CSOs need to have their role as active intermediaries in the democratic process reinforced, to fulfil their mission of advocacy and of indirect representation of the citizens in the societal challenges, which is now increasingly necessary in the context of the pandemic and the consequent economic crisis and social discussion currently ongoing.

Despite an increased demand for services from the target groups CSOs serve, the majority of them had to adapt their offer, or even reduce or cease to operate their programs.

On the other side, many of these organizations have also made human and material resources available to face the crisis, started offering new services and initiated public campaigns of support and/or advocacy. They fulfilled an essential social role and it is important to map it and evaluate its impact as well as their capacity to continue to perform it in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.1 Purpose and structure of the study

The present document is meant to provide a comprehensive view of how CSOs related to EESC Diversity Group members or similar as per scope and mission reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic and to the consequent restrictive measures adopted in Europe. This study maps the responses of European CSOs to the current crisis in order to identify their inputs and contributions and learn from possible shortcomings, also outlining the major consequences and challenges for CSOs in the aftermath of the crisis, aiming at an increased visibility of CSOs actions and their benefit for European societies.

The present report follows the subsequent structure.

Chapter 2 summarises the overall study methodological approach and the data collection process, including the online survey administered to the EESC Diversity Group members and other CSOs across Europe and beyond and which results have been complemented and substantiated through tailored desk search.

Chapter 3 is the core chapter gathering the findings of the study, specifically the economic and organizational impacts generated by the pandemic and the governmental responses on the CSOs, providing also an overview of the reactions put in place by the CSOs that participated in the study and a more in-depth analysis of such initiatives by mapping them according to the core activity area the CSOs declared to belong to.

Lastly, Chapter 4 presents the recommendations formulated by the study authors based on the knowledge gained about the consequences of the pandemic on the future of the organized European civil society, as they are perceived by the survey respondents. The content of this section is rooted with references to sources identified through a desk search and, most importantly, on the insights provided by the respondents when consulted about their views and concerns in relation to the mission and role of CSOs in the post-COVID-19 recovery and the way this unprecedented global challenge will eventually change their capacity to foster civic dialogue and participatory democracy. Their perspectives, along with the outcomes of the webinar held on the 3rd of November 2020 with the Diversity Group Presidency

¹³ Pornschlegel S. (2020), Countering shrinking spaces. Recommendations to support EU civil society, published by European Policy Centre. Available at: https://wms.flexious.be/editor/plugins/imagemanager/content/2140/PDF/2020/Countering_shrinking_spaces.pdf.

Members, have supported the identification of a number of key areas for reflection to be further explored in future works and studies and informed the elaboration of the final policy recommendations.

The document also includes three Annexes, i.e., the complete questionnaire that was administered online to the CSOs (Annex 1), the relevant statistics resulting from the analysis of the quantitative sections of the survey (Annex 2), and the catalogue of new and adapted services, initiatives and activities put in place by CSOs across the EU and beyond (Annex 3).

2. Methodology

2.1 Overall approach

The study was conceptualised (Figure 1) to provide the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) with:

- A **MAPPING** of relevant CSOs actions put in place to cope with the crisis, including the identification of activities, resources and results.
- An **ANALYSIS** of what was achieved, at what cost, with what benefits, the main problems, the accomplishments, and the reasons behind all this.
- A set of **RECOMMENDATIONS** based on the consequences and challenges collected, either for the CSO's and society, as well as to decision-makers and policy organisations.

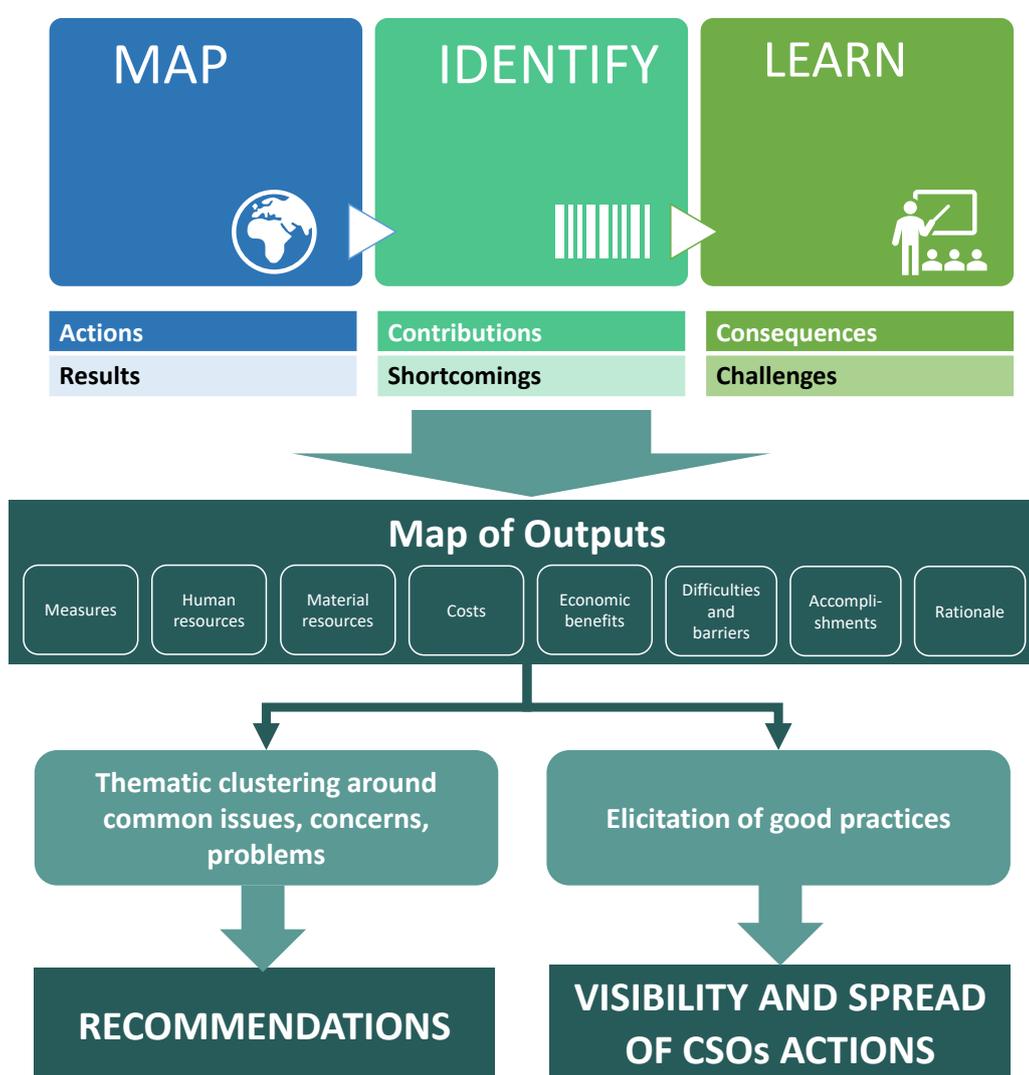


Figure 1 - Methodological approach for the study

2.2 Online survey

In consideration of the short timeline of the assignment, the cornerstone of the data collection methodology chosen for this study was an online questionnaire aimed to identify the response of CSOs to the new challenges brought by the pandemic, namely the actions they took to respond to societal needs arisen as a consequence of the COVID-19 crisis.

As for the structure of the survey, it was composed by 4 sections, grouped in 2 phases (see Annex 1).

Phase 1 had the purpose of **MAPPING**. It includes sections 1 and 2 and respondents had time to fill them out until the 15th of September (nevertheless upon request of several CSOs' networks and with the aim to grant the new EESC Diversity Group members, the study team and the EESC study responsible officer have agreed to keep the whole survey open until the Phase 2 deadline).

Section 1 intended to profile the CSOs that participated in the survey and asked for information that characterizes each organization and its area of work.

Section 2 was focused on the new or adapted activities the CSOs have developed on the ground, namely those in three main areas:

- directed to target groups in need of support due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- actions of information and support to members and target groups.
- advocacy and awareness-raising measures towards public authorities.

If the respondents filled in Section 2, they were then eligible to pass on to the second phase of the survey and provide more detailed information regarding these new or adapted initiatives the CSO had implemented, their societal impact and the impact of the pandemic on the CSO.

Phase 2 intended to **IDENTIFY** and understand the impact of CSO's activities. The expected deadline to complete sections 3 and 4 was settled on the 1st of October 2020. Nevertheless, in consideration of the end of the EESC term of office and in order to allow more time for respondents (with particular attention to the new EESC members) to fill out the survey, the final deadline has been extended until the 9th of October 2020.

Section 3 asked for more details concerning the new activities and initiatives implemented during the pandemic and mapped in phase 1. Specifically, the objective was to collect more in-depth information concerning their rationale, scope and their impacts on members and target groups, the human and material resources involved, costs, revenues, obstacles and accomplishments¹⁴.

Lastly, **Section 4** intended to understand the impact of the pandemic in each CSO, mainly asking for the challenges they had to cope with during this period and the ways the COVID-19 crisis and the consequent measures affected their role in society.

The respondents were expected to spend around 15-30 minutes to fill out all sections of this survey.

The invitation to complete the survey have been sent to all the 103 members composing the EESC Diversity Group (at the time when the survey was launched), as well as to the following networks:

- *Stakeholders Network on Age-Friendly Environments (SHAFE)*;
- *European Covenant on Demographic Change*;
- *Caritas Network*;
- *PROgramma Mattone Internazionale Salute (PROMIS)*, Italian network of health regional and local authorities promoting multi-stakeholder international cooperation in health and social care domain;

¹⁴ The questions related to operational aspects of the organizations were not mandatory for those CSOs that do not have access to the related information.

- *European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing (EIP on AHA) Reference Sites Collaborative Network (RSCN);*
- *AGE Platform Europe;*
- *Consortia of several European projects.*

Furthermore, in order to increase coverage and with the intent to pursue the best possible balance in terms of geographical and area coverage, tailored posts have been broadly disseminated on social media (namely, LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter) with the support of the EESC communication staff and the survey was sent to the European CSO networks members of the EESC Liaison Group that spread it around their national members.

On the 2nd of October, the EESC staff has also invited the new Diversity Group members (50) to participate in the study and/or help reach out possible respondents among CSOs in their national networks of influence.

Since the results of the survey represent the main source of information and learnings that guided to the formulation of recommendations, aimed to define the best strategies and measures necessary to support the CSOs for the coming period, ensuring the broadest coverage possible in terms of geographical representations, as well as diversity of types and scopes of the CSOs represented in the sample, has been considered a central criterion to shape the methodology. For this reason, all the respondents, regardless they were formal EESC members or not, have been asked to state whether they recognize their organization as potentially affiliated to one of the following activity areas which represent the various economic and social interests of organised EU civil society in the EESC:

- Associational Life
- Consumers and Environment
- Farmers
- Liberal Professions
- SMEs, Crafts and Family Business
- Social Economy.

In the event the respondents did not express any specific choice and whereas possible, the authors have assigned their input to the EESC categories most aligned with their specific field of activity. As a consequence, only a small number of survey respondents have been kept in the residual group “Other” as they did not consider that the scope and mission of their organizations were categorizable in any of those above and the authors considered that in fact they were fitting none of the EESC categories.

Such categorization has allowed the study team to gain an in-depth understanding of the diversity of problems and challenges faced by CSOs operating in different sectors of the economy and society.

The lack of capacity to provide structured and consistent categorizations by either type of organization or area of activity is the major limitation affecting any study which investigates the heterogeneous, varied and multi-dimensional complexity of the organized civil society. If it is clear that academics and practitioners find it difficult to agree which organisations are rightly included among CSOs¹⁵, the same difficulty is encountered by representatives of CSOs that, in consideration of their mission and scope, might be affiliate to both the EESC areas Social Economy and Associational Life, for instance.

¹⁵ Kohler-Koch B, Quittkat C (2009), What is civil society and who represents civil society in the EU? Results of an online survey among civil society experts, *Policy and Society*, 28:1, 11-22, DOI: 10.1016/j.polsoc.2009.02.002.

2.3 Complementary desk search

In addition to the administration of the online survey, a complementary desk search has been performed. Although the contractual arrangements, timeframe and scope of the study did not per se allow for a systematic review, the study authors have made an extensive search through official reports from international institutions, CSOs' networks and European institution, as well as web articles and scientific papers whereas relevant, with the threefold aim to:

- Supply the reader with broader statistics to support key statements on trends and patterns;
- Account for the wealth and variety of research studies and surveys conducted by independent bodies and CSOs' networks, in the attempt to document the ongoing impacts affecting the operations of CSOs across the EU and worldwide;
- Ground conclusions and recommendations drawn from the results of the survey by linking to internationally acknowledged sources.

To these purposes, the authors consulted and cited a broad range of sources, namely from:

- European Economic and Social Committee studies, opinions, proposals and articles published in the EESC Diversity Group newsletters
- European Commission, the Council of Europe and EU agencies, such as the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, reports, studies and press releases
- World Health Organization press releases and reports
- International Labour Organization and EUROFOUND studies
- OECD collection of papers "OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19)"
- United Nations guidance documents and its main bodies and agencies such as UNECE, UNESCO, OHCHR, among others
- World Economic Forum publications
- CSOs' networks' (such as CONCORD, Civil Society Europe, Social Platform, AGE Platform Europe, SDG Watch, among others) studies, position papers and statements.

3. Study findings

The present chapter constitutes the backbone of the study, as it presents the findings of the online survey in relation to the impacts of the pandemic on the European CSOs, their members and target groups, and the information gathered on their reactions across Europe.

For the sake of readiness of the documents, the graphics illustrating the statistics obtained from the quantitative analysis of the online survey results are included in the Annex 2.

The first section of this chapter illustrates the analysis of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the containment measures adopted across Europe on the CSOs, their operations and finances. In the second section, the varied responses put forward by the CSOs in the form of newly settled or adapted services, initiatives and activities are mapped by activity area.

Per each of the areas, a mixed set of sources is used leveraging the wealth of information provided by the survey respondents and complementing it with tailored desk research whereas suitable and needed. In total, 112 people have completed the survey. Gender, age and education profiles of the respondents are summarized in Annex 2.

Overall, CSOs headquartered in 26 out of the current 27 European Union countries, plus additional European (outside the European Union) countries participated with relevant contributions to this study.

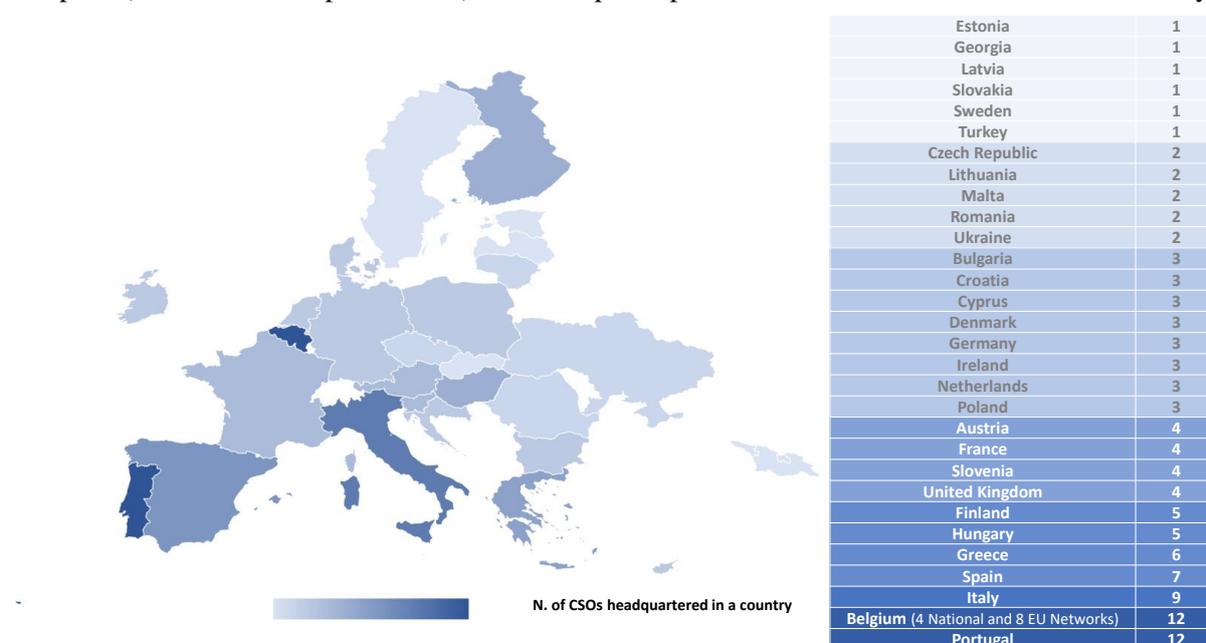


Figure 2. Geographical distribution of the CSOs participating in the study

The geographical coverage of the CSOs they represent is predominantly national (56%), followed by European-level networks and organisations, accounting for the 16% of the participating CSOs.

41% of the respondents have stated to be EESC members, all of them belonging to Group III (Diversity) except for two in Group I (Employers) and one in Group II (Workers). In two cases only, two organisations have submitted two different survey answers each. These were the cases of the Danish Consumer Council, where both the respondents are EESC members, and AGE Platform Europe, as they have highlighted two different new actions put in place in the context of the pandemic and run by different departments: being both relevant and pertinent they are considered valid for the study purpose.

3.1 Economic and organizational impacts of the pandemic and the containment measures adopted by governments

On March 11th 2020, the World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 a pandemic. Since then, the governments of countries all over the world have responded differently to contain the spread of the virus. Based on the survey results, it is possible to state that **the restrictions that governments implemented have made it difficult for CSOs to continue with their traditional activities**, thus, producing a substantial effect on the groups they work with.

During the ongoing second COVID-19 wave, the organized civil society is still facing several constraints on its ability to carry out its work, as a result of lockdowns, distancing, and quarantine measures. However, they **keep their work and unveiled new and innovative, flexible and adapted ways of maintaining their core mission and the support to those most in need**, as especially section 3.3 will highlight.

The survey respondents stated that 33% of them have seen their operations strongly affected by COVID-19 and 30% of them expect lower revenues than in 2019. This reflects the outcomes of the several studies and rapid analyses carried out so far across Europe¹⁶ and in some cases in specific regions such as the Balkans¹⁷ as well as in neighbour regions like the ones belonging to the Eastern Partnership¹⁸, which unanimously report that the main financial problems CSOs are facing relate to the postponement or cancellation of projects, programs or activities, lack of financial resources, drop-in donations, the impossibility of organizing fundraising events, etc. Similar results were obtained from the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ), a European Union–Council of Europe youth partnership, that has commissioned a survey¹⁹ with the aim to hear from people working or volunteering in youth organisations, initiatives and networks across Europe on the effects of COVID-19 on youth work and youth activities. All the 48 youth organisations participating in the questionnaire stated they have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This included project delays, reduced outreach and a decrease in visibility, as well as lack of financial support from private and public institutions. Almost all their projects were cancelled, such as volunteering or mobility programmes and youth centres were closed.

International networks such as CIVICUS has echoed the appeal from CSOs asking donors and intermediaries to offer “as much flexibility, certainty, and stability towards grantees and partners as possible”²⁰.

In this direction, goes the Opinion of the European Parliament Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs²¹, that called for the allocation of appropriate funding in the 2021 budget to CSOs that promote democratic and funding values of the EU.

When asked about the main ways COVID-19 pandemic has affected their operations, the **key points raised by the participants to the present study were mobility restrictions, struggles in introducing and getting adapted to new modalities of work and services’ delivery as well as reduced or**

¹⁶ Solidar Foundation (2020) Briefing Note “Putting Solidarity in Social Distancing: CSOs at the Forefront of Social Innovation”, available at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Social_Solidarity_Social_Distancing_April_%281%29.pdf

¹⁷ Balkan Civil Society Development Network (2020), COVID-19 Pandemic: The Effects to and the Impact of Civil Society in the Balkan Region The State of CSOs, their Involvement in the Crisis Response & State and Donor Support, available at: <http://civicspacewatch.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/78-6-Balkan-Civil-Society-in-the-COVID-19-Crisis-Part-II.pdf>.

¹⁸ Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (2020), Supporting the viability and sustainability of EaP civil society during the COVID-19 crisis, EAP CSF COVID-19 Briefing Paper, September 2020. Available at: <https://eap-csf.eu/wp-content/uploads/COVID19-Briefing-Paper-Viability-and-sustainability-of-EaP-civil-society.pdf>.

¹⁹ Youth Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe (2020), Effects of Covid-19 across youth work and youth activities, available at: <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/72351197/CMJ+survey+PEYR+final.pdf/3bae8038-2744-c280-6cae-08d670b8489e>.

²⁰ CIVICUS (2020), Open letter: Donors and supporters must act to ensure civil society resilience against COVID-19 pandemic, 19th March 2020, at: <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/media-releases/open-letters/4346-open-letter-donors-and-supporters-must-act-to-ensure-civil-society-resilience-against-covid-19-pandemic>.

²¹ European Parliament, Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (2020). Opinion on general guidelines for the preparation of the 2021 budget, Section III – Commission (2019/2213(BUD)), available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/LIBE-AL-648629_EN.pdf.

cancelled operations and, most importantly, reduced face-to-face interactions. Loss of funding has been mentioned as a critical point by almost one fourth of the respondents.

The costs incurred by the CSOs participating in the study have increased for 42% of them, which reflects either the rise in demand for many of their services or the need to invest in IT infrastructures and digital equipment or physical equipment to adapt facilities.

With particular reference to ICT systems or platforms to keep members and/or users connected, communicate and provide them with assistance, 39% of the CSOs participating in the survey stated they needed to acquire one.

In line with the above, those CSOs which work could not fully convert their activities in online modalities had to make the bigger investments in terms of equipment and adaptation of their installations to the new regulations.

When asked whether the CSOs had to hire or not new staff to perform their new or adapted actions in response to the pandemic, the majority of the respondents have answered they didn't need to hire new employees across the EESC different areas, with the highest percentage shown in the Associational Life area (67%). Nevertheless, some differences could be noticed. For instance, Social Economy and SMEs, crafts and family businesses were the EESC categories where the CSOs participating in the study most needed to contract new personnel while all the respondents belonging to the Liberal Professions area declared that they did not contract any new staff members. Interestingly, in the latter case it is important to differentiate between the CSOs themselves and their members: while the associations and networks of liberal professionals kept the same staff, their members operating on the "ground" (e.g., labour consultants, tax accountants, legal and financial advisors, etc.) have witnessed a huge increase of activity that has led many of them to have employees working extra hours and/or hire new employees due to the surge of requests for support from their clients to apply for pandemic-specific financial aids. In relation to the need of hiring new staff or not for those CSOs categorized as "Others" (thus not recognizing themselves as categorizable in any of the EESC activity areas), the diversity of answers reflects the heterogeneity of respondents and corresponding CSOs spanning from healthcare focused organization carrying out operational duties and service provision on the ground and networks and federations acting more on a lobbying and advocacy level.

Lastly, with regard to funding sources, own funds, private sector donations, membership fees and European funding are the most common ways the CSOs stated they finance their activities with. Most of them have provided multiple answers, highlighting that blended funding is the most frequent option, i.e., not having a unique source for financial support. None of them have provided the relative shares and no centralized databases exist to analyse retrospectively time series of such shares, so it is hard to say how the typologies of funding sources and their respective weights have changed as a consequence of the outbreak.

Nevertheless, when asked about the extent and utility of the financial aids provided in their respective countries, most of the CSOs have responded that either there were no specific programmes for their type of organisation (38,2%) or the existing programmes were not relevant for their organisation (23,7%). Several CSOs across Europe are **calling the attention of European institutions on the financing difficulties they are undertaking and will be still facing in the attempt to continue to fulfil their essential mission.** This applies to EU-level networks which get a considerable part of their funding from the EU through a range of EU programmes, including the Rights Equality and Citizenship programme, among others. Given the exceptional circumstances caused by the pandemic, a group of European networks, including the European Disability Forum and AGE Platform Europe, have sent a formal letter

to the EU Commissioner for Budget and Administration²², to ask for enabling more flexibility in the reallocation of resources, allowing redirection of planned activities and types of deliverables and waiving or significantly reducing the 20% co-financing requirement for the operating grants for 2020 and 2021. In the same direction, the SDG Watch Europe which is an EU-level, cross sectoral CSO alliance of CSOs from the development, environment, social, human rights and other sectors, has warned that the already scarce public funding for civil society has to be excluded from any budgetary cuts²³.

3.2 Overview of the CSOs' response to the COVID-19 pandemic and containment measures

There have been several discussions and conversations on various virtual platforms about the response of civil society to the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of adaptation of operations, but also how effectively the sector is engaging with communities.

From the desk search carried out by the study's authors²⁴, it emerges that a wide range of initiatives have been undertaken by CSOs and their networks as a massive reaction to the pandemic crisis.

Many organizations have made human and material resources available to face the crisis, started offering new services and initiated public campaigns of support and/or advocacy. They **fulfilled an essential social role and it is important to map it and evaluate its impact, as well as their capacity to continue to perform it in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

However, despite their incredible efforts and an increased demand for services from the target groups CSOs serve, several of them had to adapt their offer, or even reduce or cease to operate their programs. International organisations and networks have concentrated their effort on **making the voice of CSOs and the sectors of societies they represent heard in a rapidly changing scenarios** with the many governments taking centralized decisions to cope with the emergency. Among them, last 18th of June 2020 Civil Society Europe claimed a “rights-based recovery” plan in a letter signed together with 52 platforms of civil society organisations to the European Commission, the European Council, the German Presidency of the EU and the European Parliament²⁵. Focusing on the protection of open, inclusive and accountable governance, the civil society members of Open Government Partnership's Steering Committee have released a statement on COVID-19 and its risks to open government²⁶. In parallel, an initiative supported by a large number of CSOs and CSOs' networks across EU has led to the publication of a Joint Statement²⁷ to influence the future developments of the European Democracy Action Plan, which aim will be to increase resilience of our democracies and address threats affecting elections and the democratic debate that the crisis has contributed to exacerbate. Furthermore, many umbrella organisations and federations have continuously supported their members and partners to stay informed, adapt their programmes and keep their organisations safe.

²² European Disability Forum (2020). Letter to Commissioner Hahn: European Equality Networks COVID 19 and EU Funding – request for flexibility in budgetary regulations for 2020 and 2021, available at <http://edf-feph.org/letter-commissioner-hahn-european-equality-networks-covid-19-and-eu-funding-request-flexibility>.

²³ SDG Watch Europe (2020), EU COVID-19 recovery plan must lead the way towards Sustainable, Green and Inclusive Economies and Societies, SDG Watch Europe Statement June 2020, available at: <https://www.sdgwatcheurope.org/documents/2020/06/covid-19-statement-sdg-we-final.pdf/>.

²⁴ CIVICUS (2020), Solidarity in the time of COVID-19. Civil Society Responses to the Pandemic, November 2020. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/solidarity-in-the-time-of-covid-19_en.pdf.

²⁵ <https://civilsocietyeurope.eu/eu-institutions-repond-to-our-letter-on-europes-recovery-after-the-pandemic-and-civil-society/>.

²⁶ Open Government Partnership (2020), Statement on the COVID-19 response from civil society members of OGP Steering Committee. Available at: <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/news/statement-on-the-covid-19-response-from-civil-society-members-of-ogp-steering-committee/>.

²⁷ European Partnership for Democracy (2020), Joint Statement: 5 demands for an ambitious European Democracy Action Plan, coordinated by the European Partnership for Democracy, 15 September 2020. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/joint-statement-on-european-democracy-action-plan-coalition-of-46.pdf>.

In addition, the local and regional actions undertaken by CSOs carrying out essential work “on the ground” and service provision have been highlighted in several media outlets and collected in relevant online platforms and portals.

The present mapping is built based upon the responses provided by the CSOs participating in the survey and integrated with relevant considerations extracted from the analysis of other relevant collections²⁸⁻²⁹⁻³⁰ of initiatives and actions. The analysis of the results of the mapping allows to spot the light on key trends, commonalities, innovative solutions and challenges that are left untackled.

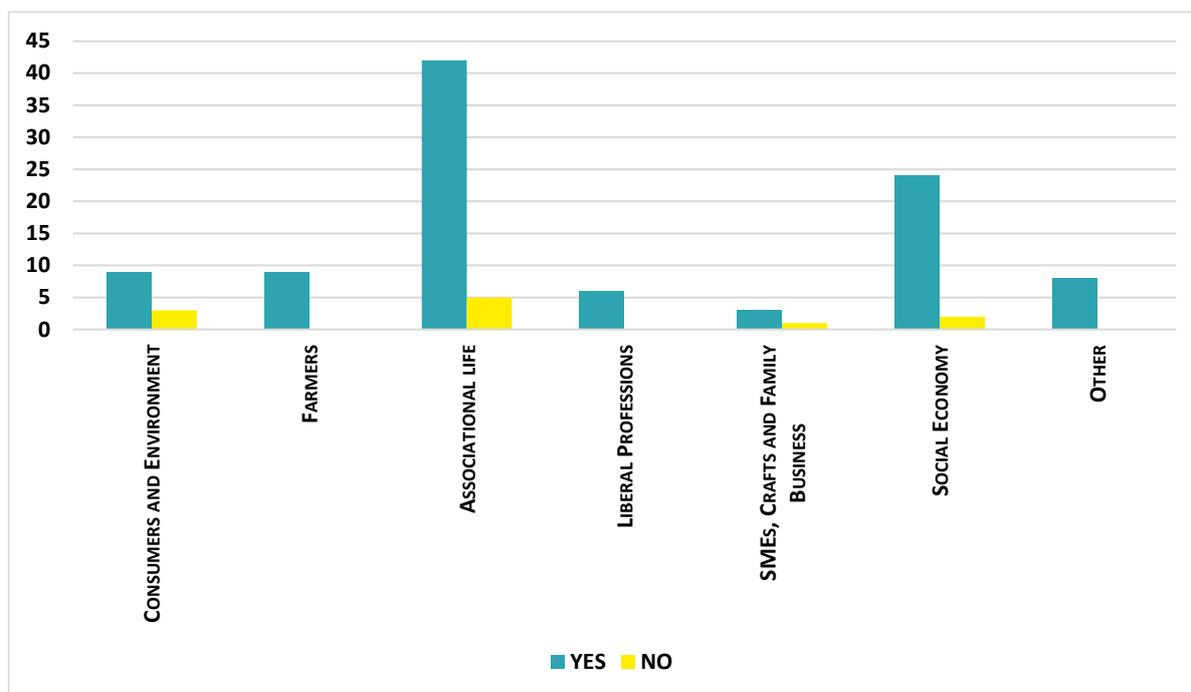


Figure 3. Distribution of respondents who have declared to have put in place new or adapted initiatives across EESC areas

The vast majority of the respondents declared that they have designed and put in place new initiatives or adapted services to face the extraordinary circumstances brought by the pandemic, with only 11 out of 112 stating that they have continued to run their regular activities with no major changes.

All those CSOs that have reported that they didn’t put any specific new activity in place in response to the pandemic challenges are either networks and federations (i.e. second level organisations not active in the field but performing exclusively informative and representative activities aimed at providing reliable documentation sources to their members or advocating for their rights and needs) or they are small-sized national ones with prominently informative or educational activities, which have been partially interrupted or whereas possible converted in online formats while keeping the same aim and targets. The same applies to those respondents who did not tick any of the six EESC activity areas and selected “other”.

For the 11 organisations that stated no new or adapted initiative was undertaken the survey ended, thus the next information and related quantitative data apply only to those 101 respondents that have asserted

²⁸ Social Platform website, “COVID-19 – Responses & Reactions of our Members”, updated regularly at: <https://www.socialplatform.org/what-we-do/covid-19-responses-reactions-of-our-members/>.

²⁹ Civil Society Europe website, “COVID-19: civil society at the forefront”, at: <https://civilsocietyeurope.eu/covid-19-civil-society-at-the-forefront/>.

³⁰ Civitates website, “Responding to the COVID-19 crisis”, at: <https://civitates-eu.org/responding-to-the-covid-19-crisis/>.

their CSOs have activated new or adapted measures. The geographical distribution of the latter is presented in Figure 4.

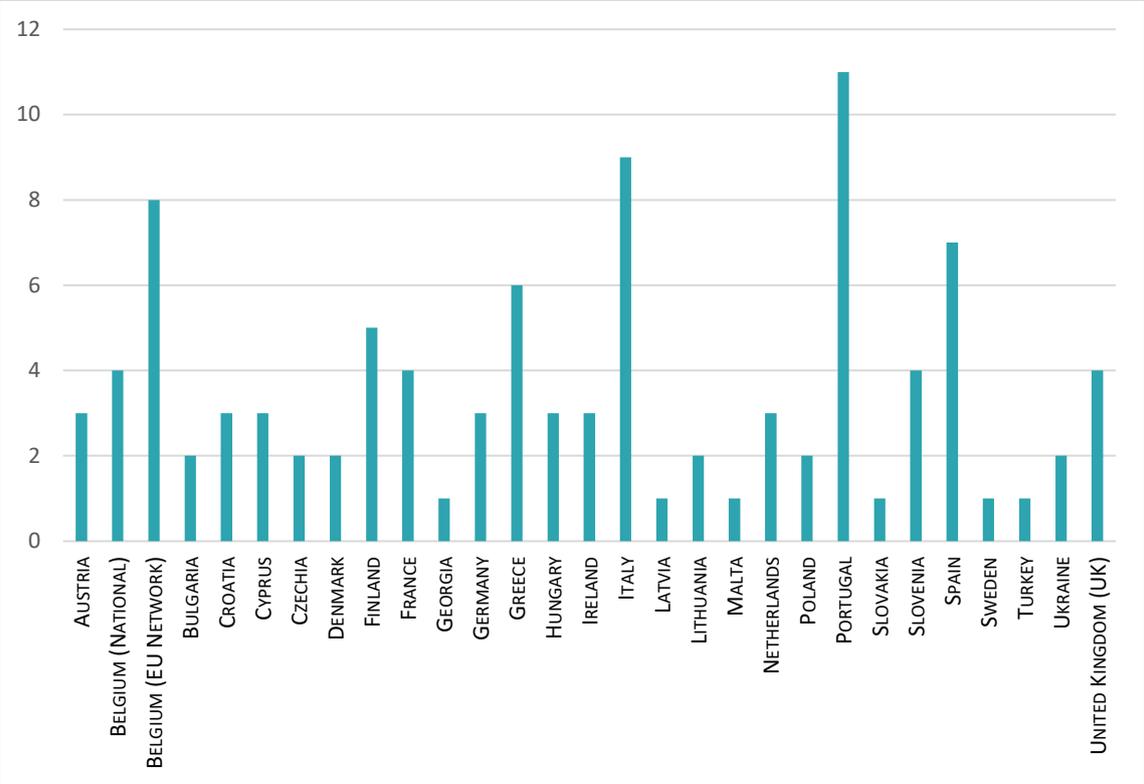


Figure 4. Geographic distribution of the CSOs that have declared they have put in place new or adapted activities

These organisations have been also asked to explain what strategic approaches they adopted to reconvert rapidly their activities and maximise efficacy of the new services and initiatives (Figure 5). The respondents were allowed to select more than one answer in order to better capture the variety of strategies which in many cases brought to adopting a combination of different approaches.

It is relevant to highlight that 77 of them have stated that they have continued to offer their existing services adapting the provision modalities to the new regulations, 55 reported they have strengthened existing services and 69 declared they have converted those services into online services. It is thus clear that the first main purpose of CSOs was to encounter manners to still be able to provide the services that are at the core of their mission and which prosecution was somehow threatened by the pandemic and the confinement measures, which is also confirmed by the fact that 85 out of 101 (84%) told that the activities performed were aligned to their mission.

However, more than one quarter of the CSOs were able to progress further and provide new responses to the new needs: 26 reported that they have launched brand new or customized new services while 6 have also expanded their service portfolio addressing different groups than their traditional members and targets. This demonstrates the quick adaptation capacity of CSOs and their sensitivity to the emerging societal needs as they appear.

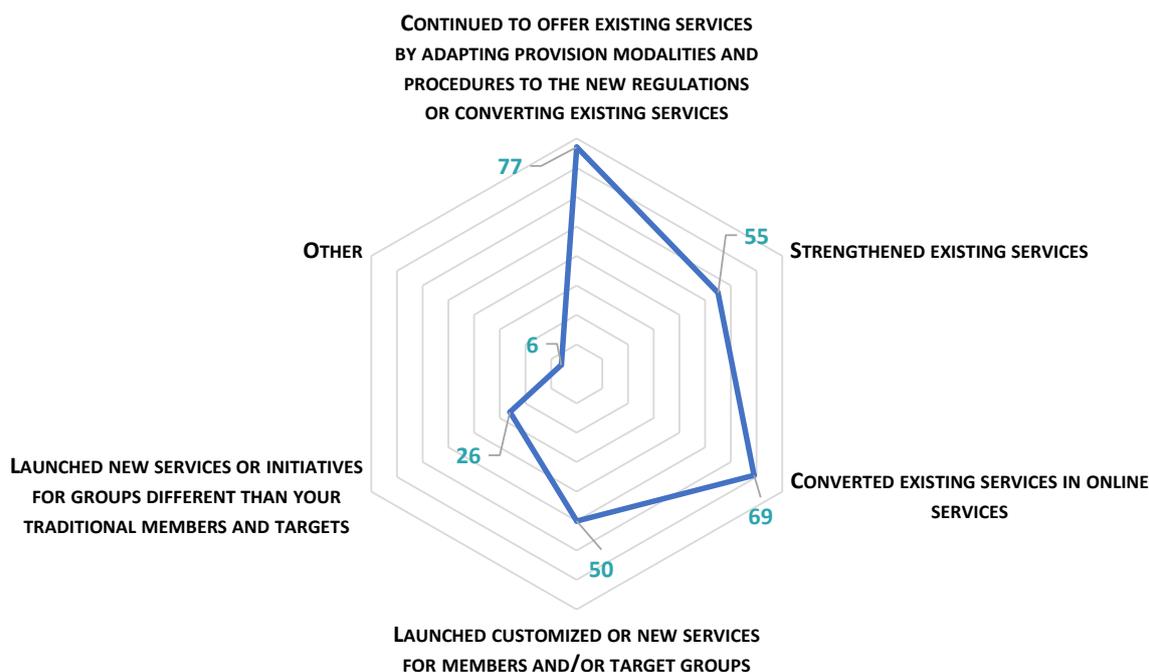


Figure 5. Strategic approach adopted by the CSOs

Looking at the distribution of the same answers per each of the EESC activity areas (Figure 6), it is noticeable that, on average, the same ratio is maintained, except for the Consumers and Environment area, where most of the CSOs participating in the study took action to either continue offering the same services under the new regulations, converting existing services into online services or rather launch brand new or customized services for specific needs.

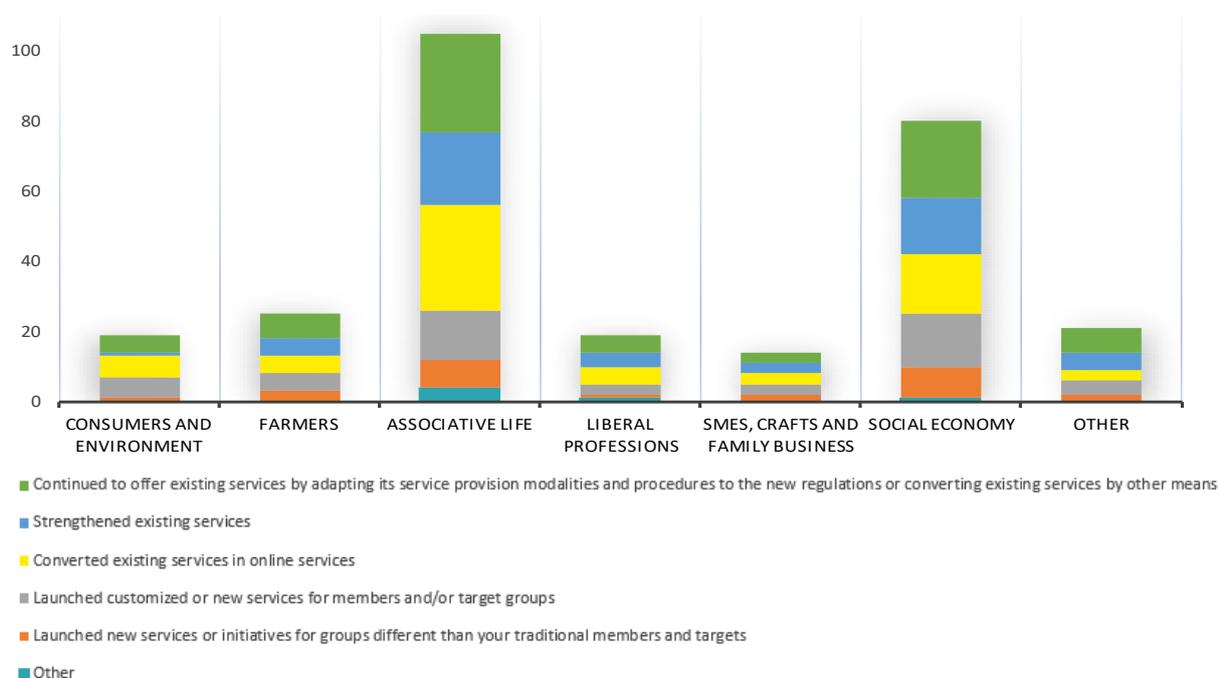


Figure 6. Approach adopted by the CSOs participating in the survey in each of the EESC activity areas

In order to aggregate the new or reshaped activities and initiatives according to the main purposes they were pursuing, the CSOs have been asked to indicate which of the following aims their initiatives have been designed to fulfil:

- **Activities directed to deliver services to target groups** (27%) in need of support due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Actions of information and support to members and target groups** (30%)
- **Advocacy and awareness-raising measures towards public authorities** (33%).
- **Others**, including changes in their "ordinary" actions and missions (10%).

This shows that the CSOs participating in the study cover evenly the three types of aims. Among those CSOs that have put in place activities with “other” aims than the traditional ones their statutory mission calls for, it is worth to note that several CSOs that had not been directly performing studies and surveys before, have proactively undertaken monitoring, data collection and analysis initiatives to map and study the impacts of the pandemic and the restrictions on their members and target groups and report on those. Also, in some cases, the CSOs have taken actions that were not usually in their portfolio of activities such as providing humanitarian aid and shelters to the most marginalized and impacted by the pandemic’s consequences as well as putting in place brand new and innovative services. An example of those is the "business advice programme" delivered by Volunteer Ireland which is giving company volunteers the opportunity to share their business knowledge, experience and expertise with the community and voluntary sector via their company’s employee volunteer programme³¹.



Figure 7. Type of new or adapted initiatives, services or activities put in place by CSOs

The diverse range of activities implemented (Figure 7) spans from online and phone assistance to members (which together account for more than 22% of the activity types selected by the respondents), advocacy, information and awareness raising (9%) as well as contribution to the policy making debate (7%), training, education and leisure initiatives (4%), health and social care services (6%), activities aimed to facilitate coordination among CSOs (7%) and connection among members (7%) as well as

³¹ Volunteer Ireland website, Business Advice Programme, at: <https://www.volunteer.ie/services/corporate-volunteering/business-advice-programme/>.

legal, financial and administrative support actions (8%) and initiatives aimed to stimulate mutual aid among members (4%). Finally, research initiatives have been pointed out by foundations and independent research institutes (5%) while cultural and artistic activities account for the 1% of the initiatives described.

3.3 Mapping of CSOs that developed new or adapted initiatives per activity area

The following sections provides a detailed overview of the background, challenges reported and initiatives implemented in relation to the COVID-19 measures, mainly rooted on the stakeholder consultation performed by the survey. However, being the answers received extremely varied in length, and also in terms of distribution per area, desk search was used whenever deemed necessary to fill in gaps and/or enrich the descriptions.

In each area, the outcomes of the stakeholder consultation run through the administration of the online survey are illustrated along with highlights from relevant good practices emerged from the 101 new or adapted initiatives reported by the respondents. Their distribution per country and EESC category is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of the new or adapted initiatives reported by the CSOs participating in the survey per country where the CSOs are based and EESC category

Country	Consumers & Environment	Farmers	Associational Life	Liberal Professions	SMEs, Crafts and Family Business	Social Economy	Other	Tot.
European Union								
Austria		1			1		1	3
Belgium			8		1	2	1	12
Bulgaria			2					2
Croatia	1		2					3
Cyprus		1					2	3
Czech Republic			2					2
Denmark	1		1					2
Estonia								0
Finland	1	1	1			2		5
France		1	2			1		4
Germany			2	1				3
Greece	1		3		1	1		6
Hungary			3					3
Ireland		1	2					3
Italy			3	2		3	1	9
Latvia						1		1
Lithuania	1					1		2
Malta				1				1
Netherlands	1	1				1		3
Poland	1						1	2

Country	Consumers & Environment	Farmers	Associational Life	Liberal Professions	SMEs, Crafts and Family Business	Social Economy	Other	Tot.
Portugal	1		1	1		7	1	11
Romania								0
Slovakia							1	1
Slovenia	1	1	2					4
Spain		1	4			2		7
Sweden		1						1
NON-EU								
<i>Georgia</i>			1					1
<i>Turkey</i>			1					1
<i>Ukraine</i>				1		1		2
<i>United Kingdom</i>			2			2		4
Total	9	9	42	6	3	24	8	101

3.3.1 Associational life

3.3.1.1 Background and context

The category “Associational Life” within EESC is “made up of members who belong to national or EU-level voluntary sector organisations and represent foundations, associations, NGOs or other types of organisations interested in promoting the rule of law and free movement of people and goods, as well as protecting civil liberties and human rights”³².

The newly adopted category name “Associational Life” (formerly “Voluntary Sector”) covers then a broad range of organized civil society groups working to foster the common good, striving for equality of rights, freedoms and opportunities, and playing “the role of a mediator between individuals and the state, defending the general interest and the crucial values of mutual respect and altruism, whose corollaries are pluralism and social benefit”. It is of utmost importance to stress that this category is the most varied in terms of types of activities and targeted stakeholders, being a distinctive feature of these CSOs their ability to bring together a combination of mostly highly motivated volunteers and dedicated employees around a range of activities, in the sense of active civic participation that strengthens common European values, such as solidarity and social cohesion³³.

3.3.1.2 Stakeholder consultation

Associational Life is one of the broadest activity areas covered by nearly half the respondents to the survey (N=47 out of N=112 and N=42 of the N=101 that have stated they have put in place new or adapted initiatives). This sub-group includes 12 EESC Diversity Group members and 30 CSOs’ representatives reached out through social media channels, as well as the EESC partner organizations and Liaison Group collaborating networks.

³² EESC website, categories, available at <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/members-groups/categories/voluntary-sector-category>.

³³ EESC (2017) Opinion “Financing of Civil Society Organisations by the EU” (own-initiative), available at <https://mempportal.eesc.europa.eu/Public/Documents/MeetingDocuments?meetingId=2148545&meetingSessionId=2184097>

The CSOs present in the sample presents a well distributed geographical coverage, with organisations based in Belgium (N=8), Croatia (N=2), Czech Republic (N=2), Denmark (N=1), Finland (N=1), France (N=2), Georgia (N=1), Germany (N=2), Greece (N=3), Hungary (N=3), Ireland (N=2), Italy (N=3), Portugal (N=1), Slovenia (N=2), Spain (N=4), Turkey (N=1), United Kingdom (N=2).

Among the CSOs based in Belgium, 6 out of 8 are European organisations and networks, one is operating at regional level and one at national level.

The initiatives collected are either specifically targeted to certain population groups or generically oriented to broader audiences (N=14). The beneficiaries of the target-specific activities and initiatives put in place by the CSOs included in the sample range from women (N=2), families (N=1), youth (N=4), older people (N=12), disabled persons (N=4), patients suffering from specific diseases (namely, Alzheimer and multiple sclerosis), and migrants (N=2).

In terms of legal and organizational forms, the outcomes of the survey reflect the variety of types of organisations that recognize themselves as belonging to the “Associational Life” sphere, with a predominant presence of associations (N=31).

3.3.1.3 Main challenges reported

Member States including Belgium, France, Latvia and Greece reported an **increase in domestic violence** during the lockdown, with incidents tripling within one month in Greece, for example³⁴. The French Secretary of State for Gender Equality declared that the French platform dedicated to domestic violence received five times more reports during the eight weeks of confinement than in a normal period³⁵. One of the survey respondents, the Women’s Room – Center for Sexual Rights, established in Croatia, highlighted there were not any exceptional services and/or measures made available during the COVID-19 pandemic to protect women from violence. Thus, they suddenly had to face with major problems, especially about accommodation of women and children in shelters due to lack of self-isolation facilities and insufficient protective equipment. The necessary equipment for shelters and counselling centers was provided by local authorities and the Croatian government only at the end of May. Furthermore, although there was an increase of violence against women during the lockdown the courts worked in a lesser extent, only urgent proceedings were resolved while other hearings (including cases of violence against women) were adjourned.

Several older persons’ and pensioners’ associations and networks went through similar experiences with the sudden necessity to shift as many activities as possible online, although with an additional hurdle connected to generally **lower digital literacy level of older people**, as reported by the European Ageing Network (EAN) along with several confederation of retired persons across France, Portugal, Belgium, Slovenia and Turkey, the Spanish Confederation of Older People Organizations (CEOMA) and the German National Association of Senior Citizens’ Organisations (BAGSO).

Furthermore, in several media and in society in general, COVID-19 is being considered as a problem of older people, falling on numerous occasions into ageist approaches³⁶ which have been documented in early research works conducted by independent research institutes and supported by movements and civic groups protecting older people rights and advocating against discriminatory attitudes. A good sample of those, both at EU and national level, are represented among the catalogued initiatives. Wise

³⁴ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2020), Coronavirus pandemic in the EU – fundamental rights implications, Bulletin #3, May 2020, available at: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-coronavirus-pandemic-eu-bulletin-june_en.pdf.

³⁵ “Hausse des violences conjugales pendant le confinement”, article published in Le Monde, 30 March 2020, at: https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/03/30/hausse-des-violences-conjugales-pendant-le-confinement_6034897_3224.html.

³⁶ García-Soler, A., Castejón, P., Marsillas, S., Del Barrio, E., Thompson, L., Díaz-Veiga, P. (2020) Ageism and COVID19: Study on social inequality through opinions and attitudes about older people in the coronavirus crisis in Spain. LTCcovid.org, International Long-Term Care Policy Network, CPEC-LSE, 12 June 2020.

Age (UK) has denounced **increased levels of ageist discrimination** in employment due to large numbers of newly unemployed younger people and the fact that government COVID-19 responses in employment were geared massively towards the young. This implied, for instance, less opportunities to take part in training programmes for 50+ unemployed. This sector of the population, in UK as in most of the EU countries, includes the majority of the persons at higher risk of suffering the worst consequences of the disease due to their age and/or chronic diseases as well as those that are digitally excluded because of digital illiteracy or lack of good quality connectivity and equipment, thus being unable to participate in COVID-proof alternative provision.

In the same regard, AGE Platform has highlighted generally scarce funding for acquiring the necessary equipment and skills, stressed or lacking human resources in senior organizations coupled with lack of volunteers able to operate and cope with the psychological fatigue connected to work in a context where older people's organisations were on the front line being elderly the most exposed to worse COVID-19 outcomes as well as uncertainty about future plans. AGE released a report on **COVID-19 and human rights concerns for older people**. The report refers both to alarming situations and promising practices for respecting older people's human rights. The latest version of the report includes:

- risks to the right to health, including mental health and palliative care,
- how digital exclusion adversely impacts older people's opportunities for social contact and access to information, medical and other essential goods and services,
- the increased risk of violence and abuse during the lockdown,
- the specific challenges faced by older people in residential settings, those who live alone and those who receive care at home.

The report has also been enriched with new insights about the **multiple disadvantages faced by older women, older LGBTI people and older Roma people**. Finally, it includes some recommendations useful for policy makers, service providers, and the media. Moreover, AGE Platform Europe reported another initiative which is the setup of a specific webpage³⁷ to provide reliable information on the pandemic and the challenges it raises to older persons and to the whole society, by gathering recommendations, good practices and initiatives from members and other partners.

Worsened **conditions of people suffering from intellectual, mental, physical and learning disabilities**, loneliness and increased need for psychological and emotional support for them and their carers, combined with the unpreparedness of the educational system and the social services represent another core challenge that associations and NGOs are contributing to tackle. Changes in personal routines, worries and enduring self-isolation are extremely stressful for any person, but they are likely to have a greater impact on disabled persons or contribute to worsen existing mental health conditions, as denounced by the Global Disability Movement (Greece) and the European Disability Forum at international level.

The **increase of people in vulnerable socio-economic situations due to job loss, sharpened inequalities and impoverishment** of the most disadvantaged ones are indeed among the biggest societal challenges that the pandemic brought in and Europe will take long time to revert. The most vulnerable includes poorer households and those dependent on informal employment, including casual day labour, seasonal migration or mobile livelihoods; small-scale producers; those without savings and with little recourse to insurance or alternative sources of income. For those with employment, many are low paid workers in essential services and highly exposed to the virus. As reported by Caritas Europa, a broad network of 49 national member organisations in 46 European countries, job losses, increase in poverty, inequality, precarious work and untenable living conditions for certain groups, such as those suffering,

³⁷ AGE Platform Europe, website (page dedicated to COVID 19) <https://www.age-platform.eu/coronavirus-covid-19>.

on top of COVID-19, from the consequences of the fires in the Moria refugee camp and in Roma settlements. The network has repeatedly called the attention of governments and media on the fact that the third sector indeed faces a disproportionate burden of death and illness during the spread of the virus due to the higher health risks faced by workers on the front line, typically taking care of the most vulnerable people, providing food, emergency support as well as the lack of protective clothing, masks, other supplies, etc. In some countries where national Caritas organisations are present, such as Italy, the network reported staff members and members of their families have died thus leading to increased mental ill-health, stress, and psychological challenges of the staff. Further, budget cuts have been impacting staff and almost all their usual service provision needed to change as a result of COVID-19 and whereas possible taking advantage of new technologies.

Voluntary organisations reported that in many cases (such as the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)) they witnessed a twofold challenge. The need to increase resources due to the rising demand for the services they provide (often on behalf of the public sector) and the lack of revenues which they usually used to support such activities, as they were mainly based on **parallel social enterprise activities that could not take place during the pandemic**. Nevertheless, the overall effort put in place by the voluntary sector has been tremendous and the collection presented in the catalogue in Annex 3 offers a broad overview of actions put in place by CSOs to answer emergency needs such as food, medicine, hygiene product, childcare support for those parents who could not telework, etc.

3.3.1.4 Highlights of successful practices in Europe

The Women's Council of Denmark and several organisations working to **protect women rights, older people rights and youth rights** and foster their participation, inclusion and employability such as Youth Work Ireland, report they switched their services to digital. For example, the Youth Information Online chat service has been the first of its kind in Ireland. Youth Work Ireland, together with other two organisations Crosscare and SpunOut, had long-planned this service, and they have expedited the launch to support young people during COVID-19 lockdown. The Youth Information online chat service builds on a long-standing partnership of professional youth information providers in Ireland and relies on the development of commitment to joined up working on communications, safeguarding, data protection, and youth information practice, as well as the support of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Innovative modalities to reach out the youngest sector of the population and provide them with reliable, accurate and transparent information have been reported also in other countries, such as Spain, where the organization JUVEUCAN (European Youth of Canary Islands) has organized a web streamed event along with other organization and broadcasted in through StreamYard on YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. Another example of **youth sensibilization actions** run primarily through internet and social media, it is the initiative "Youth for You" the Student Youth Council in Georgia reported and run in collaboration with the organization Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund (ASB) for the benefit of disabled people, thanks to the mobilization of part of the resources assigned to the funded project "Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disability – Supporting Social Service Providers in Rural Georgia".

The survey results show that several CSOs having as their core mission social care, but also other entities from the associative world aiming to different statutory objectives, have stepped in delivering aid to those who lack other forms of social protection and support, either through formal or even informal movements, bringing to light emerging **solidarity circles and new forms of civic activism**. This is the case of the Scout organization in Czech Republic which is the largest organisation of children and youth in the nation. Nationwide, scouts could participate as individuals in the system (www.skautskapomoc.cz) connected to the Elpida Seniors' Line: the line received inquiries from seniors, entered them into the online system and volunteers applied to meet them. Over 700 volunteers registered

in the system. Being a telephone line, it was also suitable for seniors who are not used to working with the Internet and their reactions were very positive, also due to the fact that scouts are an overall trusted organisation.

Similarly, the Volunteer Center Augsburg (Germany) started a call to action in the city and reached out - most of them online - 1.400 citizens willing to volunteer in this crisis. They matched those volunteers to citizens in need (doing shopping, visiting by phone, staying in contact, driving service) while other volunteers helped at service association for homeless people and at the food bank (risking to be closed because they had older volunteers being themselves at risk). As they were overwhelmed with volunteering offers, they also started the brokerage to other associations who are in need of volunteers. Several CSOs across EU have helped bring **awareness of the pandemic's impact on persons with disabilities** and their rights and draw attention to promising practices and key actions for States and other stakeholders. The Spanish Confederation of Families of Deaf People (FIAPAS) has put the spotlight on the lack of accessible public information and communication, accessible distance education, adapted teaching materials and modalities as well as evaluation processes at school for deaf students. The use of facial masks makes clearly impossible lipreading for people with a hearing disability, thus FIAPAS' Accessibility Services have increased its activities addressed to make public information accessible through live subtitling for the Spanish population with hearing loss (more than 1 million citizens). In the framework of the Cooperation Agreement between FIAPAS and the Parliament, main hearings at the Parliament have included live subtitling provided by FIAPAS. This service of live subtitling has also been provided to the press conferences issued after Council of Ministers.

To respond to the need of **digitalisation**, several training and courses were organized with the aim to reduce the literacy gap and allow older people to take the most benefit from online connectivity. In the case of Caritas Germany, it has developed an “open source” software for online counselling services, which can be accessed and modified by anyone³⁸ interested and thus might serve as a good basis for other Caritas Europa members that are setting up or already working with online counselling services.

On another note, renowned CSOs are also active across Europe in the field of **scientific research**. The Italian Multiple Sclerosis Society (AISM) and its Foundation (FISM), along with the Multiple Sclerosis Study Group of the Italian Neurological Society (SIN), have set up a Research Program that is meant to represent an answer, as complete as possible, to this unprecedented event for people suffering from this progressive neurodegenerative disease. Multiple Sclerosis and COVID-19 (MuSC-19) platform³⁹ is collecting national and international clinical data to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 infection on people affected by MS. More than 1000 subjects are currently included in the study.

Lastly, it is also important to stress that several CSOs and CSOs' networks have themselves promoted **studies and large-scale surveys to gather a better understanding of the situation**, the main needs and challenges faced by Europeans and try to identify fast and effective solutions. From the desk search carried out by the study team, for instance, it has emerged that SOS Malta as the Fund Operator for the Active Citizen's Fund, is asking for citizens' and citizen groups' support in identifying the main shortcomings experienced or that are highly likely to be caused by the COVID-19 outbreak upon voluntary organisations' activities and their level of support for end beneficiaries through a survey that is currently ongoing⁴⁰. On the same note, the European Research Network on Philanthropy (ERNOP) has set up a living webpage where they publish relevant studies on the effects of (the fallout of and

³⁸ The code can be accessed via the following websites: <https://caritasdeutschland.github.io/documentation/> and <https://github.com/CaritasDeutschland> (both in English).

³⁹ Multiple Sclerosis and COVID-19 (MuSC-19) platform, available at <https://musc-19.dibris.unige.it/>.

⁴⁰ Survey on COVID-19 effects on Voluntary Organisations, available at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ACFCOVID-19effects>.

recovery from) COVID-19 on the philanthropy sector in Europe, including the direct contact details of the principal investigators⁴¹.

3.3.1.5 Conclusions

The vast array of challenges tackled and initiatives undertaken that is illustrated above mirrors the variety that features the composition of the “Associational Life” category and the consequent heterogeneity in terms of size, scope and reach of the CSOs participating in the study. This makes particularly hard to draw univocal conclusions with respect to the extent and the gravity of the impacts that the pandemic has generated on the CSOs composing this sub-group and their members and service end users.

Nevertheless, based on the analysis of the reactions they have reported some common traits can be emphasized as follows:

1. Among the initiatives mentioned by the respondents, most of them highlighted that **all kinds of activities** they were previously running in a physical modality **that could be shifted to online mode were converted to virtual** and processes and services consequently adapted.
2. Almost all the CSOs from the “Associational Life” area participating in the survey, although at different levels and within diverse geographic scopes, have tried to **keep their information services running and have even intensified their efforts in documenting** the evolution of the situation and its consequences on the most vulnerable segments of the population (namely, on older people, women and children victims of abuses, disabled people, patients suffering from other diseases who have seen their treatments and care services they rely upon disrupted).
3. **New solidarity circles and also the new forms of civic activism** erupted during the pandemic. Although many of these took the form of spontaneous individual or collective actions from citizens willing to help those most affected by the pandemic consequences, in many cases the respondents have highlighted the key role of their CSOs in acting as collectors and catalysers of such sense of sense of solidarity and responsibility making available their platform, mobilization capacities and experiences to channel and amplify the good outcomes of diverse and dispersed initiatives.
4. Another common trait was the **fast capacity to shift priorities and adapt** to the rapidly worsening situation demonstrated by those CSOs which stepped in **offering types of services that were not in their portfolio of activities** before COVID-19 spread or fastening the launch of services that were in their future pipelines but not in place yet.

3.3.2 Consumers and environment

3.3.2.1 Background and context

The main objective of the CSOs working under this area is to ensure that consumer rights and environmental protection are taken into consideration in policy and implementation measures in Europe and the EESC group under this theme works also as a forum for participants to discuss the policies implemented in their own countries.

Civil society plays indeed a relevant role in promoting environmentally responsible choices and sustainability, being a potential driver for positive transformation e.g., local initiatives can pioneer and model new practices that can then be used and leveraged by other actors, including policy makers,

⁴¹ ERNOP.EU, European research on the effects of COVID-19 for philanthropy, available at <https://ernop.eu/european-research-on-the-effects-of-covid-19-for-philanthropy/>

leading eventually to either incremental or radical changes in practices and policy. Civil society can also influence the market indirectly, for example by increasing consumer awareness⁴².

3.3.2.2 Stakeholder consultation

Twelve CSOs from eleven different countries, either belonging to the EESC “Consumers and environment” activity area or self-recognising themselves as potentially affiliated to it, have participated in the study, thus including both consumers’ organisations and environmentalist organisations. From these, the majority are associations (N=10).

However, besides these CSOs, it is also relevant to report on those that, when asked what categories of stakeholders they were targeting in their actions, ticked the “Consumers” category as it is common to assimilate consumers to the broader definition of “Citizens” (see question Q25, Annex 2). Also, some of the activities generally typical of consumers organisations such as fighting against illegal trading practices might be relevant also for other CSOs predominantly active in the “SMEs, Crafts and Family Business” EESC area, as well as the “Social Economy” EESC Area. Further, the stakeholders were asked to highlight the specific kind of interest or relevant issue connected to consumers their CSOs were mainly dealing with. The majority emphasized that their actions were, directly or indirectly, meant to safeguard consumers’ safety and promote sustainable consumption (see question Q25B, Annex 2).

3.3.2.3 Main challenges reported

For what concerns consumption, the European Consumers Organisation⁴³ is calling the attention on the **unprecedented disruption brought by COVID-19 to people’s daily lives, travels and finances**. Many have lost their income, are struggling to repay their credit and worrying about how to cope with their energy bills. A recent special issue of the Journal of Business Research has collected 13 papers illustrating the dramatic changes in how businesses act and consumers behave across various economic sectors⁴⁴. As the crisis is also rapidly changing policy actions by the EU and its Member States, European consumers’ networks have been advocating for and asking governments to make sure that measures taken at EU and national level to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on the economy take full account of consumers’ interests.

During the pandemic, the main challenges reported focus on a number of issues that were already pressing for consumers before the virus spread and saw a dramatic surge in statistics during the first pandemic wave, namely:

- travelling restrictions and other restrictions causing **cancellations and lack of refund** from the sellers;
- different kinds of **scams (mainly online)** taking advantage of consumers being scared of COVID-19.
- broader economic impacts linked to the increase in unemployment rate, resulting in possible over **indebtedness and taking of high-interest loans** (flash loans).

In the area of environment, no specific challenges were reported in the survey developed under this study, but from a broader desk search, some are possible to highlight⁴⁵:

⁴² ARTS (Accelerating and Rescaling Transitions to Sustainability) project (2016), Transition Read (n. 3). The role of civil society in accelerating sustainability transitions, available at <http://acceleratingtransitions.eu/wp/?wpdmdl=1550>.

⁴³ BEUC website, COVID 19 and consumer policy, webpage collecting actions, responses and issues detected by the BEUC secretariat and network of consumer groups, at <https://www.beuc.eu/covid-19-and-consumer-policy>

⁴⁴ Naveen Donthu, Anders Gustafsson (2020), Effects of COVID-19 on business and research, Journal of Business Research, Volume 117, 2020, Pages 284-289, ISSN 0148-2963, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.06.008>.

⁴⁵ Geneva Environment Network website, COVID-19 and the Environment, available at <https://www.genevaenvironmentnetwork.org/resources/updates/updates-on-covid-19-and-the-environment/>

- The high increase in the use of **disposable protective equipment** is a massive threat for the environment.
- Lockdowns and the loss of tourism revenue creates challenges for **protecting wildlife**.
- **Exposure to hazardous substances**, namely to ‘disinfect’ spaces and workers, is a major risk.

3.3.2.4 Highlights of successful practices in Europe

In responding to the fallout of this crisis, the European Consumers Organisation (BEUC) has undertaken a variety of actions in terms of **documentation, information and advocacy**. Among these, they published a report⁴⁶ taking stock of the actions conducted by consumer organisations across Europe during the pandemic. As the report illustrates, “in only a few weeks’ time consumer organisations managed to re-organise their work to ensure that the rights of consumers remain protected even in time of crisis”. Their outcomes help to inform the main actions that may be recommended for the future in this area.

In line with the above-mentioned core objectives that most of the consumers organizations are pursuing at COVID-19 times, the Consumers Protection Center Greece warned about the watering down of consumers rights especially in the transport sector: they edited several press releases and sent several **letters of protest** to Greek and European institutions to complain against the undermining of consumers rights.

The Polish Consumer Federation witnessed, as many others in Europe, abrupt changes in daily consumers life due to lockdown. They tried to compensate the limited direct access to consumer advisors by providing **advice and information on-line and by phone only as well as arranging thematic webinars** e.g., on energy savings and energy bills at households while spending more time at home with, in many cases, lower economic resources available.

The Consumers’ Union of Finland advised consumers on scams related to COVID-19 through their website, social media accounts and also by organizing webinars on the matter and through their telephone advice line. This awareness-raising was not targeted to a specific group as anyone can fall a victim to such scams and it is delivered as part of a more general project focusing on any digital scams⁴⁷. In addition, the Danish Consumer Council reported that they took direct action in helping consumers **choose the safer face coverings in the market** and to this purpose they tested 13 different protective masks and disclosed the results among their members and beyond, so that all consumers can make an informed choice about purchasing and using PPE⁴⁸. Lastly, the Lithuanian Solar Energy Association, aiming to educate the public about the technologies for the use and production of solar energy, intensified their information services directed to producing consumers of solar electricity, via on-line consultations and support.

When it comes to organizations devoted to environmental protection and education as well as promotion of sustainable development and climate-friendly practices and policies, the universe of actors is broad and varied. Among the respondents to the survey, Natuur & Milieu - Nature and Environment, Dutch environmental organization committed to creating a healthy natural environment, published a **sustainable travel guide** (*Holiday without flying*) with 13 dream destinations in the Netherlands⁴⁹. Many

⁴⁶ BEUC (2020), ON THE FRONT ROW. Consumer organisations’ work to support consumers in the COVID-19 crisis and the fight against unfair practices, Ref: BEUC-X-2020-099 – 19/10/2020. Available at: https://www.beuc.eu/publications/beuc-x-2020-099_on_the_front_row_-_members_fight_against_covid_scams_and_unfair_practices.pdf.

⁴⁷ The Consumers’ Union of Finland website, available at <https://www.kuluttajaliitto.fi/hankkeet/huijarit-kuriin/koronavirukseen-liittyvat-huijaukset/>

⁴⁸ Danish Consumer Council (2020) PPE testing, available at <https://taenk.dk/test/mundbind>

⁴⁹ Natuur & Milieu (2020) Holiday without flying, available at <https://www.natuurenmilieu.nl/themas/mobiliteit/projecten-mobiliteit/luchtvaart/vakantie-zonder-vliegen/>

environmental organizations heavily involved in educational activities, such as ODRAZ - Sustainable Community Development (Croatia), were not able to go to schools and regularly keep their workshops with children related to sustainable development and SDGs, thus they prepared **on-line training materials** that can be used by them or by their teachers. They also invited school children to send us the drawings, watercolours, collages related to 17 SDGs and will prepare on-line exhibition of children's works.

As illustrated in the Associational Life area, it was also common to see environmental organizations traditionally devoted to support sustainable development shifting their activities or launching new initiatives to help cope with the emergency. An example is provided by “TERRAS DENTRO - Association for the Integrated Development” that adjusted its intervention to the conditions and needs of the populations and the crisis through the implementation of social intervention projects, in support of young people who do not have computer equipment and Internet access for schoolwork. In partnership with the Schools, they prepared print and distribute educational materials to the students, supporting the use of digital tools and articulating between teacher families. Terras Dentro also provides emotional and social support to families, children and young people to those in need and a psychological and wellness support line was created, with the aim of informing, supporting, advising and referring, especially older adults.

3.3.2.5 Conclusion

This thematic area includes a varied array of challenges and initiatives. The pandemic brought several situations that harmed consumers, such as cancelled flights and travel reimbursement or safety policies in touristic installations, and queries related to online shopping. The more prevalent activities related to consumers rights included (i) **empowering consumers through personal assistance and advice**; (ii) providing consumers with **trustworthy and regularly updated information**, through publication of articles, setup of dedicated webpages and appearance on traditional media; (iii) Launching **online tools**; (iv) **Engaging with traders, public authorities and monitoring legislation**.

In the area of environment protection and building on the information reported in the survey of the study and on the desk search performed, it is clear that, the pandemic brought several challenges and environmental issues, but also represents an opportunity for **turning around from unsustainable consumption and production patterns**. To this aim, two main activities appear as the most relevant:

1. The CSOs demonstrated willingness and capacities to react proactively and find out **innovative formats and methods for educational activities** focused on the environment and sustainable development, when outdoor and group activities are restricted.
2. The CSOs active in the field of environmental protection are having an important role in fostering **alternatives for recycling disposable materials** that highly increased during the pandemic, such as masks and related protective materials.

3.3.3 Farmers

3.3.3.1 Background and context

Many CSOs concerned in this thematic area refer to smallholder farmers, including crop farmers, fishers, livestock keepers and other resource users. These civil society organisations aim to ensure that smallholder farmers' voices, priorities, and interests are actively heard and reflected in the design, implementation, and monitoring of policy making and related initiatives. At the country level, these

CSOs often also provide technical expertise, knowledge and capacity to ensure transparency and accountability and implement projects in the ground.

At global fora, the CSOs in this category play also a central role in advocating, for example, by raising awareness for the farmers needs and supporting policy-making changes with the governments.

3.3.3.2 Stakeholder consultation

Nine respondents declared they are or would affiliate to the Farmers activity area in consideration of their mission and scope. Each of them is from a different European country, with a good representation of all European macro-regions. The majority of the respondents are Professional associations (N=5), followed by other types of associations (N=3).

3.3.3.3 Main challenges reported

Limits on the mobility of people across borders and lockdowns are contributing to **workforce shortages in agriculture** in many countries, particularly those characterised by seasonal demand peaks or labour-intensive production. For example, newly implemented travel bans within the European Union, as well as the closure of the Schengen Area, have significantly reduced the available workforce for the fruit and vegetable sector in a number of European countries⁵⁰.

The Austrian Chamber of Agriculture, amongst others, reported **significant changes in consumers' habits** that are threatening entire sectors such as floriculture.

The Spanish Coordinator of Farmers and Livestock Organizations (COAG) warned about a number of issues such as:

- (i) **the lack of technical and digital means in rural areas** to carry out meetings with sufficient quality and keep the communication between farmers and union leaders;
- (ii) great difficulties in hiring agricultural workers and guaranteeing adequate conditions in accommodation, etc. as well as all the necessary means to guarantee that they are free from being infected by COVID-19, highlighted also by the Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners in Finland among others;
- (iii) problems related to **agriculture sales** due to the closure of markets and
- (iv) in the livestock sector, animal feeding systems based on the **use of soybeans** creating a very serious dependency and fragility in situations like this pandemic.

The Farmers Union of Cyprus witnessed a number of negative effects due to the pandemic on their members of and in the primary sector. In Cyprus, where the economy depends to a large extent on tourism, many **hotels and restaurant did not work**. Farmers who planned their crops before the pandemic, saw their crops discarded or not harvested, this resulting in huge economic problems for them. In addition, the agricultural sector of Cyprus is highly dependent on the labour force coming from Third Countries. The Government's decision to ban and **not issue new permits for foreign workers in agriculture** is another negative factor in this area.

According to some relevant studies (e.g., the Sustainability assessment of food and agriculture systems, - FAO United Nations⁵¹), the pathway to agricultural sustainability is found in the size, scale, and organizational characteristics of farms and the social matrix in which these farms are embedded, meaning that agricultural sustainability is more prevalent in areas with high levels of civic engagement and through middle-size or family operations, rather than large-scale, corporate farms⁵². However, the

⁵⁰ OECD (2020), COVID-19 and the food and agriculture sector: Issues and policy responses, 29 April 2020. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/covid-19-and-the-food-and-agriculture-sector-issues-and-policy-responses-a23f764b/>.

⁵¹ FAO (2013), SAFA – Sustainability Assessment of Food and Agriculture Systems Guidelines. Version 3.0. Rome, available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3957e.pdf>.

⁵² Lyson, T., & Barham, E. (1998). Civil Society and Agricultural Sustainability. *Social Science Quarterly*, 79(3), 554-567. Retrieved December 4, 2020, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42863819>

smaller farming structures were especially threatened by the COVID-19 pandemic, as their financial resources are scarce.

3.3.3.4 *Highlights of successful practices*

To react to this situation, several farmers' associations, cooperatives' networks and chambers of commerce, such as the Netherlands Agricultural and Horticultural Association (LTO) and the Federation of Swedish Farmers (LRF) have activated initiatives and **online platform to help farmers match with jobseekers**, mainly from sectors affected by the closedown, such as nearby hotels and restaurants.

COAG participated in an initiative that brought together more than 200 agricultural organizations and NGOs of state and local character about the importance of **direct sales from farmers to consumers** demanding the opening of local markets and fairs. In addition, together with organizations of self-employed workers, they released a document⁵³ to stress the **value of local commerce** with different support proposals, including support for local commerce in rural areas as a way to face depopulation⁵⁴. Several other organizations, such as the Confédération Paysanne Farmers' Union in France, the Irish Farmers Association and the Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry of Slovenia (CAFS) have emphasized how crucial digitization of communication has been in keeping their work ongoing.

Lobbying activities toward the government for obtaining financial assistance for entrepreneurs who were impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, as well as providing **online or phone assistance** to members to help them apply for such aids were among the most common actions undertaken across Europe.

In response to increasing demands and time pressures on farmers and growers, the National Farmers Union⁵⁵ increased its support services, offering help with legal, planning and taxation matters, marketing and food promotion. NFU CallFirst also provides every member with unlimited access to **no-fee professional and legal support on business matters** from in-house specialists.

3.3.3.5 *Conclusions*

According to what was reported, the farming structures were especially threatened by the COVID-19, namely due to the **lack of human resources available** on one side; on the other hand, because the **demand for agricultural and animal products** severely diminished with the closing of restaurants, hotels and the decrease in tourism.

The CSOs backing this sector provided support especially through **online tools and phone assistance**, mainly aiming at clarifying the access to **aid mechanisms and funding measures** and also promoting **awareness raising** regarding the difficulties of the sector. One of the key assets they report is the **involvement and commitment of the different actors** (governments, agrarian organizations, NCFE, international organizations) in the protection of farmers, thus advocating for the development of policies that favour their sustained development, namely through **national and regional action plans and the promotion of youth and women in family farming**.

⁵³ COAG (2020) Reactivar el comercio de proximidad: autónomos del sector lanzan 57 propuestas para rescatar “el alma de nuestros pueblos y ciudades”, available at <http://coag.chil.me/post/reactivar-el-comercio-de-proximidad-autonomos-del-sector-lanzan-57-propuestas-pa-300809>

⁵⁴ Agroinformacion (2020) Los autónomos reclaman un impulso al comercio en el medio rural como revulsivo frente a la despoblación, available at <https://agroinformacion.com/los-autonomos-reclaman-un-impulso-al-comercio-en-el-medio-rural-como-revulsivo-frente-a-la-despoblacion/?cn-reloaded=1>

⁵⁵ National Farmers Association website, available at <http://www.nfuonline.com/>

3.3.4 Liberal Professions

3.3.4.1 Background and context

Liberal professions include a broad variety of actors and contexts, with 47 million people in Europe working in regulated professions in 2017, which accounts for 22% of the working population⁵⁶. According to the EESC study *The State of Liberal Professions Concerning their Functions and Relevance to European Civil Society*⁵⁷ “these tasks carried out for the common good and in the public interest include; ensuring legal protection for citizens, ensuring the rule of law within the tax and social levy system and a functioning market economy, as well as providing health care for the population. In all these areas, members of the liberal professions serve as particularly qualified service providers (E.g., as lawyers, auditors, accountants, engineers, medical practitioners).”

The crisis brought to light the importance and role of the liberal professions in the functioning of society, namely in the protection of health and fundamental rights, as well as in business advice and support.

3.3.4.2 Stakeholder consultation

The respondents to the survey developed under the present study that are categorised in the area of liberal professions (N=6) are mostly EESC Members (83%).

From the survey and also from desk research it is visible that several examples of initiatives adopted by liberal professions were highlighted during the confinement: the pharmacist as the first point of access to advice and care has been consolidated; the role of health and social caregivers was essential to overcome isolation and support the older and more fragile; lawyers were able to continue to plead in various cases; accountants were daily interlocutors of companies who needed advice on how to benefit from government aid. In Belgium, for example, notaries⁵⁸ have further increased the digitization of their activities, having obtained the right to perform Acts remotely, by teleconference, within the framework of special powers, using electronic signatures. The respondents to the survey developed under the present study refer that labour and tax consultants have witnessed a sharp increase of request for labour, legal and financial support from businesses and self-employed, as well as workers in need of help to apply for subsidies.

However, for others, in particular those related to culture, the interruption on paid work was more severe and the recovery may still be not close. “While many industries are slowly beginning to recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the arts and culture sector is still struggling with the widespread closure of theatres that is preventing many artists from performing in front of an audience, depriving them of their main source of income.”⁵⁹ Also, for architects, for example, the crisis will have significant repercussions on activity in 2021.

3.3.4.3 Main challenges reported

⁵⁶ EESC (2017) news item on the Conference “The liberal professions, a lever for the development of Europe: towards a European manifesto of professionals”, available at <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/our-events/events/liberal-professions-lever-development-europe-towards-european-manifesto-professionals>

⁵⁷ EESC (2013) *The State of Liberal Professions Concerning their Functions and Relevance to European Civil Society*, available at <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/resources/docs/qe-01-13-678-en-c.pdf>

⁵⁸ CEPLIS (2020), Interview to Bernard Jacquemin, available at <https://ceplis.org/interview-the-belgian-liberal-professions-and-the-covid-19-crisis-by-bernard-jacquemin-president-of-unplib/>

⁵⁹ New Brunswick Liberal Association (2020). Recognizing the profession of artist, available at <https://nliberal.ca/2020/09/recognizing-the-profession-of-artist/>

The pandemic and the subsequent measures implemented had a heavy impact on liberal professions. The **self-employed work mainly in the hardest-hit sectors by the lockdown**: 44% of self-employed workers versus 37% of employees⁶⁰. Furthermore, in most European countries, small businesses and self-employed workers must prove that their earnings have been negatively affected by the coronavirus to access rescue funds and this requires to afford high administrative costs which several liberal professions' associations and networks have been working to try to relieve.

The liberal professions were included in support measures, but **not thoroughly or completely on government's support**, as it is reported by several representatives of these professionals, such as CEPLIS⁶¹. Measures such as the spread of payments, social security contributions and the repayment of certain loans was made available, but they will have to be paid later. When compared to classes such as civil servants, in many situations and countries working on a reduced regime but still able to keep all their income, liberal professionals were forced to draw on their reserves as support was not provided or still much lower.

3.3.4.4 Highlights of successful practices in Europe

From the survey respondents and the desk research developed, it is reported that a significant action of the CSOs representing the liberal professionals has been to **advocate** nearby the governments that they should be explicitly included as beneficiaries of business support measures. They were reported as often forgotten or excluded from unemployment benefit schemes, daily allowances for health reasons or for the care of children. The daily sickness allowances are one of the claims that was highlighted during the pandemic and that is now being a reason for political pressure in most EU countries.

The actions of these CSOs (e.g. UNAPL⁶²) were essential to promote the re-shape of policies and obtain benefits and public support measures: "The proposal to perpetuate – until December 31, 2020 – and strengthen the solidarity fund for all companies suffering from the effects of the crisis on a long-term basis, to materialize the reductions in charges for the liberal professions in proportion to the decrease of their turnover, to transform the loan guaranteed by the State into a ten-year loan, with a fixed rate capped at 1%, to support very small businesses in the implementation of a digital strategy."⁶³

A general overview of testimonies and reports of networks supporting these professionals inform that teleworking was set up very effectively, videoconferences replaced physical meetings (sometimes with higher efficiency than face-to-face meetings) and many services were successfully maintained.

The new and adapted initiatives mentioned by the respondents include:

- **support to intellectual professionals**, either economic, as also psychological and through coaching;
- **information on prevention and protection measures**, especially for front liner workers, when they come in physical contact with their clients;
- **awareness and lobby**, namely through the development of surveys on the impact of COVID on mental and physical issues, as well as the economic factors and the actions taken by Government;
- offer to members of a free **digital platform** in order to facilitate remote connections with companies and workers;

⁶⁰ Bruegel using Eurostat data <https://www.bruegel.org/2020/04/covid-19-the-self-employed-are-hardest-hit-and-least-supported/>.

⁶¹ <https://ceplis.org/interview-the-belgian-liberal-professions-and-the-covid-19-crisis-by-bernard-jacquemin-president-of-unplib/>

⁶² CNASIM, website page dedicated to COVID19, available at <https://www.cnasim.fr/cat/covid-19/>

⁶³ CEPLIS (2020). Interview to Michel Picon, available at <https://ceplis.org/interview-with-mr-michel-picon-president-of-the-national-union-of-the-associations-of-the-liberal-professions-of-france-unapl-on-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-crisis-on-our-sector-in-his-country/>

- continuous **training** to members in order to raise the quality of the service and guarantee access to social safety nets for companies and workers;
- collaboration with the government and public administration to make **administrative procedures more effective and effective**.

These go in line with the outcomes collected through desk research. This action also presented a number of good examples of policy measures that are presented in the following paragraphs.

In Germany⁶⁴, the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy is “**funding consulting services** for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), including members of the liberal professions, that have been affected by the coronavirus crisis. Assistance for consulting of up to €4,000 without any company-own contribution can be provided”.

Luxembourg⁶⁵ notified to the Commission a scheme for companies affected by the coronavirus outbreak under the Temporary Framework, with an estimated budget of €300 million, that also includes liberal professions, through a repayable advance granted in one or more instalments to allow beneficiaries to face their operating costs.

Even if outside of Europe, one additional interesting example is the measure, under evaluation in Canada⁶⁶, of **officially recognizing the profession of artist**, which would allow this industry to have rights comparable to other professions.

Also, there are interesting examples of **successful legal initiatives on tax reliefs of donations of drugs, equipment** and other items for combating COVID-19⁶⁷ (e.g., SMEs could make deductible donations of such items to hospitals and other social economy enterprises in full, beyond the standard deduction of 4% profits).

The European Council of the Liberal Professions issued a Position Paper in June 2020⁶⁸ where they call on the European institutions to re-think their approach to national professional regulations, especially to maintain **high standards in ethics and quality of the work** delivered to the citizens. On one side, there is a need to ensure that the liberal professionals can access government support, access to protective measures and participate on the social dialogue; on the other side, there is also an expectation of a long-term planning that encompasses the increased qualification of professionals, along with the promotion of innovation and digitalisation in the sector.

3.3.4.5 Conclusions

From the challenges and initiatives reported, it is clear and also aligned with other areas, such as SMEs, for example, that the crisis has, on one side, accelerated or made visible the needed transformation and **digitalisation** of liberal companies, but also highlighted some of its challenges, e.g., teleconsultation in the health sector, often rising the **public discussion and ethical dilemmas** associated to these themes. The challenges reported in the survey are mostly connected to **bureaucracy**, mainly accelerated by the rapid evolution of the pandemic and the lack of preparation to deal with emergency situations. Also, the digital tools, although fully applied and consequent, had room to be improved, at least in its use). The

⁶⁴ German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (2020). Press release for economic policy, available at <https://www.bmwi.de/Redaktion/EN/Pressemitteilungen/2020/20200403-up-to-euro-4000-for-consulting-costs-without-any-company-own-contribution-for-smes-and-members-of-the-liberal-professions-in-the-coronavirus-crisis.html>

⁶⁵ European Commission (2020). Press release “State aid: Commission approves €300 million Luxembourg scheme to support companies affected by coronavirus outbreak”, available at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_516

⁶⁶ New Brunswick Liberal Association (2020). Recognizing the profession of artist, available at <https://nbliberal.ca/2020/09/recognizing-the-profession-of-artist/>

⁶⁷ <https://home.kpmg/uk/en/home/insights/2020/06/tmd-covid-19-tax-relief-considerations-for-businesses-donating-trading-stock.html>

⁶⁸ CEPLIS (2020). Position Paper of CEPLIS on the issues faced by the Liberal Professionals in the post-COVID-19 confinement reality, available at <https://ceplis.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Position-Paper-of-CEPLIS-on-the-issues-faced-by-the-Liberal-Professionals-in-the-post-COVID-19-confinement-reality.pdf>

large number of cases handled, the complexity of administrative procedures and the difficulties in communication with public authorities is also presented as challenging. The **political choice on the rules or beneficiaries of the public funds** for support are also identified as a potential problem in some of the countries, which needs to be in the future priorities for this area.

3.3.5 SMEs, Crafts and Family Business

3.3.5.1 Background and context

In economically developed countries in Europe, family businesses represent the oldest form of business and are still a significant part of the existing entities, playing an important social role in creating jobs, both in economically developed countries as well as in disadvantaged ones⁶⁹. Their contribution to the gross domestic product of most European countries and the creation of job opportunities is also very relevant: the contribution of small and medium-sized enterprises to the non-financial business sector in the European Union in 2017 totalised 85,2% of total employment in Greece, closely followed by Cyprus (84,1%) and Malta (80,9%)⁷⁰. Even the country with the lowest influence of SMEs in employment (of the current EU countries), that was France, still holds a percentage of 61,6.

Across the European Union, 99.8 % of all enterprises are considered to be SMEs, employing 66% of the total workforce and accounting for 56.4 % of value added (European Commission, 2019; Eurostat, 2020)⁷¹.

3.3.5.2 Stakeholder consultation

From the total respondents to the survey developed under the present study classified within the category of SMEs, Crafts and Family Businesses (N=4), half are EESC members and they are all organisations that support small companies and commerce from four different countries (Hungary, Belgium, Greece and Austria), being 2 professional associations, 1 association and 1 foundation.

3.3.5.3 Main challenges reported

Many of the current main goals of the EU Member States for businesses cannot be achieved without innovation and increased performance. Increasing the competitiveness depends on innovation and creativity⁷², which is highly influenced by external factors, such as a sufficient number of skilled workers and a favourable business environment in the country.

Beynon et al. (2020)⁷³ examined the relationship between small and medium-sized enterprises' strategies and their intention to drive future innovations, highlighting that business strategies focused on the internal environment, directly controlled by the company increased confidence in planning future innovations. Innovation was a key factor to face the COVID-19 pandemic containment measures and

⁶⁹ Lusnakova, Zuzana, Zuzana Jurickova, Maria Sajbidorova, and Silvia Lencesova. 2019. Succession as a sustainability factor of family business in Slovakia. *Equilibrium. Quarterly Journal of Economics and Economic Policy* 14: 503–20.

⁷⁰ Statista (2017) Contribution of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to total employment in the non-financial business economy in European Union countries in 2017, available at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/939710/contribution-of-smes-to-employment-in-eu-countries/>

⁷¹ Trenkle, Johannes. 2020. Digital Transformation in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises. Strategy, Management Control, and Network Involvement. <https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/10.5771/9783748922131.pdf>

⁷² Popescu, Cristina, Raluca Gh, and Gheorghe N. Popescu. 2019. An Exploratory Study Based on a Questionnaire Concerning Green and Sustainable Finance, Corporate Social Responsibility, and Performance: Evidence from the Romanian Business Environment. *Journal of Risk and Financial Management* 12: 162.

⁷³ Beynon, Malcolm J., Paul Jones, and David Pickernell. 2020. SME development strategy and product/service innovation intention: A NCaRBS analysis of the role of uncertainty. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation* 21: 3–16.

the changes it caused to traditional business and it is therefore to be considered within the analysis of the CSOs acting under the category of SMEs, Crafts and Family Businesses.

The main challenges reported concern to 3 main areas:

- **human resources** (especially connected to telework);
- **technical infrastructure**, (e.g., poor internet connection) and;
- **contextual** (daily updates on legislation, bureaucracy to access funding).

COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on small businesses, mainly because of their limited financial resources and scale of business⁷⁴. The confinement period that took place in almost all of the EU countries changed dramatically the life and the work of many micro, small and medium enterprises, forcing them to uncover hypothetical solutions to accelerate and strengthen the re-starting of their economic recovery. Furthermore, **SMEs are highly represented in sectors significantly affected by the containment measures**, such as tourism, mobility, fashion and food⁷⁵. OECD summarised the outcomes of 41 SME surveys identified world-wide on the impact of COVID-19, concluding that more than half of SMEs face severe losses in revenues; one third of SMEs fear to be out of business without further support within 1 month, and up to 50% within three months.

However, this was not impacted in the same way across the whole small business's context, as they are quite **broad and diverse**. For example, even if many artists suffered the effects of the crisis, there has been an increase in demand for a variety of arts-and-crafts activities during the confinement period and such retailers were considered more 'essential' as they were able to facilitate enjoyment during times of self-isolation⁷⁶. Many individual crafters could also find ways to provide online trainings through YouTube and thus publicise their work and maintain sales.

Also, on a general angle, OECD refers that "whereas surveys since February show that SMEs and entrepreneurs are extremely worried about the impact of COVID-19 on their liquidity position and business survival, the most recent business surveys show some confidence improvements, possibly related to the significant policy efforts to address the SME liquidity gap and the lifting of lockdown measures in a number of countries. In this context, the policy perspective is gradually shifting from liquidity support measures for SME survival, which still remains a priority in most countries, to support for recovery."⁷⁷

The **bureaucracy** and delay in accessing lay-off and other types of funding support provided by the different governments to SMEs was highlighted as a "bad example" that should not be repeated in the future. Although a good relationship with authorities is overall reported, the urgency of the measures and often the lack of human resources from public administrations to respond to all the requests was seen as an area in need of improvement.

3.3.5.4 Highlights of successful practices in Europe

It is not a simple task to collect a common pattern for the sector and neither a plain set of conclusions on the challenges and necessary measures to take for the future. However, even through diversity, from

⁷⁴ Carruthers, P. (2020). How Coronavirus can kill small businesses: COVID-19. *Personal Finance*, 2020(471), 8-10.

⁷⁵ OECDt (2020) Coronavirus (COVID-19): SME policy responses, available at <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/coronavirus-covid-19-sme-policy-responses-04440101/>

⁷⁶ NMPI (2020) Impact of COVID-19 on Arts & Crafts Retail, available at <https://nmpidigital.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-Impacts-on-Arts-Crafts-Retail-US.pdf>

⁷⁷ OECD (2020) Coronavirus (COVID-19): SME policy responses, available at <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/coronavirus-covid-19-sme-policy-responses-04440101/>

a broad desk search^{78,79,80,81} and also based on the answers provided by the CSOs that participated in the survey developed under the current study, it is adequate to aggregate the obtained results, related to the **SMEs strategy to face COVID-19 in four main areas:**

- adapt to new customer demands;
- increase the quality of the products;
- improve the quality of services;
- increase the use of technology.

Digitalisation appears to be the main strategy to respond to the new and emerging needs. The Greek CSO reports they are making a high investment on digital tools to be able to improve high quality response to members and Austria informs that besides an info-point, they implemented a chatbot to facilitate navigation of users, given the high demand. However, these are the good examples, as a survey in Europe suggests that only 56 percent of all companies with 50 or fewer employees provided remote access to email, applications, and documents for their employees, compared with 93 percent of all companies with more than 250 employees⁸² (McKinsey, 2020[15]). Overall, the response of these CSOs is acknowledged as a success, since they were able to adapt and provide the usual services, added to the emerging needs directly related to the COVID-19 topics. The capacity of adaptation and the commitment of the teams are seen as the highlights.

From the desk search developed⁸³, most of the CSOs supporting SMEs report similar types of services, mainly focusing on phone and email information; support to understand the rights and accompany the constant updates to regulations; training or actions to raise awareness on prevention and protection measures; facilitate access to financial support.

Given the specific circumstances SMEs are currently facing, **countries have put measures in place** to support them. While the first concern is public health, a wide array of measures is being introduced to mitigate the economic impact of the coronavirus outbreak on businesses. Specifically, many countries are urgently deploying measures to support SMEs and the self-employed during this severely challenging time, with a strong focus on initiatives to **sustain short-term liquidity**. Such policies take various shapes. Some countries have focused on more general policies that have the potential to cushion the blow for the economy and for all businesses. For instance, in many countries, Central Banks have stepped in to support lending by alleviating monetary conditions and enabling commercial banks to provide more loans to SMEs. Examples include the unprecedented measures taken by the US Federal Reserve and European Central Bank.

Most EU countries have introduced **specific policy measures**⁸⁴, many of them either specific to SMEs or being applicable to them. These include working time shortening, temporary lay-off and sick leave;

⁷⁸ Winarsih, Indriastuti M., Fuad K. (2020) Impact of Covid-19 on Digital Transformation and Sustainability in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs): A Conceptual Framework. In: Barolli L., Ponsizewska-Maranda A., Enokido T. (eds) Complex, Intelligent and Software Intensive Systems. CISIS 2020. Advances in Intelligent Systems and Computing, vol 1194. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-50454-0_48, retrieved on 4 December 2020 in https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-50454-0_48

⁷⁹Melo, Sandra (2020). How digital technology can help SMEs to stay afloat? In Datascope, available at <https://mydatascope.com/blog/en/how-digital-technology-can-help-smes-to-stay-afloat/>

⁸⁰ UNIDO (2020). COVID-19 Implications & Responses DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION & INDUSTRIAL RECOVERY, available at <https://hub.unido.org/sites/default/files/publications/UNIDO-COVID-Digital%20Transformation.pdf>

⁸¹ Deloitte (2020). Digital innovations for retail and SME banking in a post COVID-19 world, available at <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/in/Documents/finance/in-fa-digital-innovations-for-retail-and-sme-banking-noexp.pdf>

⁸² McKinsey (2020), *Safeguarding Europe's livelihoods | McKinsey*, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-sector/our-insights/safeguarding-europes-livelihoods-mitigating-the-employment-impact-of-covid-19>.

⁸³ Centro Internacional de Formação (2020). Supporting SMEs During COVID-19, available at <https://www.itcilo.org/pt/courses/supporting-smes-during-covid-19>

⁸⁴ OECD (2020) Coronavirus (COVID-19): SME policy responses, available at <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/coronavirus-covid-19-sme-policy-responses-04440101/>

deferral of tax, social security payments, debt payments and rent and utility payments, tax relief or a moratorium on debt repayments; loan guarantees or direct lending to SMEs through public institutions; grants and subsidies and non-banking financial support intermediaries.

Furthermore, although 75% of these organisations stated that they implemented new or adapted services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and containment measures, they all refer to **informative services** made available to SMEs (e.g. information phone line 24/7; webpage with updated information on COVID-19 legislation and possible lines of financial support) or the **adaptation of face-to-face processes into digital** ones, that allow companies to keep their activity without the need to presential actions (e.g. in Greece, the paperwork that required personal attendance of an SME associate can now be provided online). The demand from SMEs was very high – e.g., in the survey, the Belgium respondent reports that in the first week of the lockdown they received 50.000 phone calls and emails requesting information and support; the Austrian CSO informs that in the period between March and August their dedicated webpage counted 15 million downloads and a specific task force was set up to answer around 80.000 requests via phone and email.

According to the IMD World Competitiveness Ranking⁸⁵, “a marked pattern in this year’s results, which are an amalgam of hard data taken from 2019 and survey responses from early 2020, is the strength of smaller economies. The benefit of small economies in the current crisis comes from their ability to fight a pandemic and from their economic competitiveness. In part these may be fed by the fact it is easy to **find social consensus**” (Arturo Bris, Director of the IMD World Competitiveness Center and Professor of Finance). This was the case of Denmark, who ranked second in the study, followed by Switzerland in third.

SMEs are mostly owner managed and combine high innovativeness with a national or international perspective on markets and high levels of social responsibility. The future of this successful model thus depends on the ability to recognize the most important trends at a strategic level and, at the same time, to formulate answers to them at the operational level⁸⁶. Collaboration with the relevant actors in the business and societal field has a significant effect on business resilience and it may be essential to allow a proper implementation of the COVID-19 protocol in SME practices.

3.3.5.5 Conclusions

The organisations acting under this area faced several challenges with the pandemic, mainly derived to their **small dimension and scale** and also their **lack of resources and cashflow**. Most of the SMEs and small businesses report they “**went digital**” whenever possible and searched for alternatives to sell their products or provide their services. The most urgent need reported relates to the **modernisation of SMEs**, through either **digitalisation** or the strengthening of their innovation capabilities. One key enabler reported in some countries was the implementation of **structural policies** to help SMEs to continue operations, even under containment measures and that allow them to update and become resilient⁸⁷. However, the consultation developed also highlighted a high level of **bureaucracy** and several difficulties from SMEs to access funding support from governments and points out to the need of strengthening the connection between local, regional and national partners and therefore promoting **coordination and rapid consensus**.

⁸⁵ IMD (2020) The IMD World Competitiveness Ranking, available at <https://worldcompetitiveness.imd.org/rankings/wcy>

⁸⁶ Astor, Rammer, Klaus, Klose, & Böllhoff, (2016). Innovativer Mittelstand 2025 –Herausforderungen, Trends und Handlungs-empfehlungen für Wirtschaft und Politik, available at https://www.bmwi.de/Redaktion/DE/Publikationen/Studien/studie-endbericht-innovativer-mittelstand-2025.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=14

⁸⁷ OECD (2020) Coronavirus (COVID-19): SME policy responses, available at <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/coronavirus-covid-19-sme-policy-responses-04440101/>

3.3.6 Social economy

3.3.6.1 Background and context

Social economy includes “cooperatives, mutual societies, non-profit associations, foundations and social enterprises. They operate a very broad number of commercial activities, provide a wide range of products and services across the European single market and generate millions of jobs. Social enterprises are also the engine for social innovation. They have different legal forms and various objectives ranging from agriculture and banking to provision of employment and sheltered workshops.”⁸⁸.

This area refers to organisations whose primary purpose is to create social impact rather than profit. It is often called the third sector, civil society or the not-for-profit sector and is independent from local and national government, and distinct from the private sector⁸⁹. Charities, community benefit societies and co-operatives, not-for-profit community businesses or community interest companies (CICs), credit unions and small informal community groups, as well as associations and foundations are the most common examples within this category.

According to the European Commission, social economy organisations are ranging the 2 million, hiring 6% of the EU’s employees (11 million people) and representing 10% of all businesses in the EU. They have different legal forms and various objectives ranging from agriculture and banking to provision of employment and sheltered workshops.

The sector has a strategic weight in the European market and during the pandemic played an essential role, that will be even more relevant in addressing and mitigating the short- and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on economy and society, by promoting inclusive and sustainable economic models.

3.3.6.2 Stakeholder consultation

Social economy is a widely represented area in the CSOs participating in the survey performed within the current study (N=26). From the total of respondents, 23% acknowledged being EESC members.

The country distribution of their headquarters is distributed by several EU countries (although their action is broader, as some of the CSOs act throughout Europe, e.g., Association PINS).

Even if sharing common principles and practices, social economy organisations in general show a great diversity in terms of legal forms, size, outreach and sectors, potentially including not-for-profit (focusing more on the social component) and for-profit entities (more economic-oriented)⁹⁰. This diversity is also clear in the legal forms chosen by the CSOs participating in the survey as best describing their structure, which range through the following options (7 CSOs chose 2 or 3 different legal forms to describe their organisation). From the respondents, 9 refer to be associations, 4 social enterprises, 4 research institutions and 7 refer “other” types than the ones listed.

Social economy organisations were traditionally involved in the provision of social services and healthcare but are currently are active in a wide range of sectors throughout the economic landscape⁹¹. Most of these organisations are CSOs but there are also some examples of large entities and groups of social economy organisations that can be competitive even with large companies. The business models for social economy are diverse but quite rooted in societal values and sustainable governance: they mobilise multiple resources, often apply sustainable operating practices, are locally anchored and facilitate co-operation and social innovation. Moreover, they adopt inclusive and democratic

⁸⁸ European Commission (2020) Social economy in the EU, available at https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/social-economy_en

⁸⁹ Reach Volunteering website. What is the voluntary sector?, available at <https://reachvolunteering.org.uk/guide/what-voluntary-sector>

⁹⁰ OECD (2020). Social economy and the COVID-19 crisis: current and future roles, available at <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/social-economy-and-the-covid-19-crisis-current-and-future-roles-f904b89f/>

⁹¹ *ibidem*.

governance, involving and empowering diverse stakeholders in their decision-making processes, thus promoting informed decisions about economic and social impact and a high degree of democracy in society.

3.3.6.3 Main challenges reported

The changes brought by the COVID-19 containment measures involved many aspects of the organisations: from remote work which has become a customary modality, to the reorganization of spaces and working times; to the implementation of all safety and protection devices for workers, users, volunteers. In the sectors of the organisations dealing with welfare and health, the impact has also been powerful because it is requiring an overall rethinking of the way of working and designing services.

If some CSOs report that they continued providing their services through virtual means and even increased their requests (e.g., in some liberal professions), there are also sectors, especially in social economy, where the impacts were incredibly negative:

Citing a respondent to the study survey: “the pandemic significantly changed the situation of SOSTE's member organisations, social and health CSOs in Finland: 80% cancelled face-to-face group and peer support meetings; 40% closed their offices; 30% **cancelled their services**. CSOs that provide services reported monthly losses of up to hundreds of thousands of euros and even the risk of bankruptcies. As a result, the lives of many changed significantly. Limiting social contacts meant **loneliness and isolation** for many. Many lost their income and people could not access all the social and health services they needed. People in the most vulnerable situation may not have been able to access digital services and may not have received enough information about the corona virus and restrictions. Their situation may have deteriorated considerably without anyone noticing. Social debt began to build up and that is one of the major challenges to solve now, as the future funding of social and health CSO's is uncertain.”

During the pandemic, according to the reported information in the survey delivered under this study, several CSOs having as their core mission social care, but also other entities aiming to different statutory objectives, have **stepped in delivering aid to those who lack other forms of social protection**.

Also, due to the interruption of many health and social care services during the lockdown, online and phone-based psychological support to users and family members have become determinant. Due to the closure of the daily services for disabled, mentally impaired and older people, amongst others, caregivers and family members were suddenly overwhelmed by the huge increase in the demand. In this regard, several of the participating CSOs have been at the forefront in coping with the need to secure continuity in basic health and care services to frail older people, long term patients and patients at higher COVID-19 risk such as oncological patients.

The respondents reported that the increase of **people in vulnerable socio-economic situations** due to job loss, **sharpened inequalities and impoverishment** of the most disadvantaged ones were the biggest societal challenges that the pandemic brought in and Europe will take long time to revert. The most hurt by job loss are often those depending on forms of informal employment, such as migrants in seasonal labour or those on casual day labour. Moreover, the most vulnerable are usually also those without savings or few alternative income sources and thus the pandemic and the containment measures increased their need of support for essential needs. In this regard, the collection presented in the catalogue in Annex 3 offers a comprehensive overview of actions put in place by CSOs to answer emergency needs such as food, medicine, hygiene product, childcare support for those parents who could not telework, etc.

The fear of dying from COVID-19 and the social isolation that this implied, especially to the most vulnerable groups (disabled, mentally impaired, older adults) are the major societal impacts that the respondents indicate. Frail patients had many difficult to be admitted to the hospital for acute disease

and relapsing of chronic disease due to the shortage of hospital beds and fear to be infected. The stop and reduction of the possibility to perform visits in an outpatient department have determined a delay in the diagnosis of several diseases and a worsening of chronic diseases. In particular, patients with dementia presented a **worsening in the behavioural symptoms, cognitive impairment and consequently a caregiver burden**. This was determined also by social distancing, lockdown rules and the crisis itself.

Children and youth also had to comply with health and safety regulations, which implied an increased emotional and psychological distress. For different reasons, the same emotional effects were heavy for the most vulnerable groups, namely due to lack of financial resources or a higher risk of unemployment. Sexual and Gender Based Violence, as well as **discrimination** followed an increasing trend⁹² during the confinement period, with a specific focus on domestic violence; in the same direction, **structural inequality and racism** had a higher impact on Black and minority communities.

Food, health and social assistance were some of the main basic needs that the CSOs understood as needed. The mandatory closure of some services, e.g., Day Care Centres, meant that most of the older citizens were left without basic support (food and personal hygiene) and regular visits. This implied an increased need of emotional and psychological support.

The provision of all of these services implied that CSOs had to overcome a series of constraints, which were mainly caused by contextual factors but also to the less good implementation of the contingency measures and related actions and that can therefore be improved for the future.

The need to rapidly implement the COVID-19 contingency plans and their implementation in real contexts was not always simple. On one side, the regulations were being revised and new decrees released with an incredibly high frequency, which implied **constant changes in the field conditions of service delivery**. Furthermore, the plans often implied the **purchase of protective equipment**, tools and materials that were not immediately accessible or were temporarily unavailable due to excessive demand (e.g., individual protection equipment; some medicines; ventilators). In addition, the **need for workers who can replace the ones in isolation** and ensure teams working in mirror demanded a workforce that is non-existing, for example, in the social care sector.

Furthermore, teleworking also brought enormous challenges. The more direct were connected to **insufficient tools or poor digital infrastructure**. However, more difficult to easily solve, the **lack of skills and competences** to use online facilities, combined with lack of the necessary equipment / devices, whether from the professionals as well as on the users' side, made it difficult to ensure a complete digital transition that was possible in other sectors.

Also, for **seasonal workers**, such as the tourism sector where most of them are under seasonal contracts, the unemployment and lack of qualifications to reformulate their professional careers led to financial difficulties that impacted on their personal life.

CSOs in the area of social economy also reported difficulties in **adapting the general measures** adopted by the Government and the EU in favour of enterprises to the specific needs of social economy, which was not always possible (e.g., restrictions on SME economic activities and their needs in fiscal moratoria and fiscal incentives).

3.3.6.4 Highlights of successful practices in Europe

In this area, it is worth to mention positive examples, such as the one of CEPES (Confederación Empresarial de Economía Social), that is working in close cooperation with the Spanish Government to

⁹² World Health Organisation (2020). Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Violence against women, available at https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub/q-a-detail/violence-against-women-during-covid-19?gclid=Cj0KCOjwuL_8BRCXARIsAGiC51D_xohfhmK6kUaxmOZ7t2RomyjDShjJCUNq13_5hf9x1lfCajjtHF0aAkAuEALw_wcB

jointly set up **new measures to develop and strengthen social economy enterprises** in industrial, new emerging and service sectors in medium- and long-term.

Also in Spain, the social economy financial entities (cooperative and ethical banks) have created **new financial products** to freeing up liquidity to all private sector in general and to support social economy enterprises in particular.

The work and dialogue with numerous actors and stakeholders, mainly **transdisciplinary/cross-sectoral exchanges** between scientists and practitioners, as well as dissemination and information of research results, is recognised by the respondent CSOs as a powerful tool to influencing/achieving societal and public policy changes. This was partially hindered in the first months of the pandemic in 2020, but it is now acknowledged that new forms of collaboration are solid and established virtually and will now be leveraged for the next period.

Regarding the societal challenges, the list of difficulties was long; however, the **new solidarity initiatives** brought up by these CSOs to address and face these challenges are worthy to mention:

The European Food Banks Federation (FEBA) remained open to prevent food waste and redistribute food, operating in a new and increasingly complex environment: an increased demand for food, a shortage of volunteers, a drop in financial resources^{93,94}. They launched a European COVID-19 Social Emergency Fund, an effort to secure the activity of European Food Banks calling on corporations, foundations, organizations, and private citizens to join efforts supporting Food Banks in Europe. The goal is to raise EUR 10 million in three years. During the period March-July 2020 FEBA had contacts with more than 80 corporations, foundations, and organizations for a total commitment of EUR 4.4 million.

Cáritas Coimbra kicked-off two campaigns to support families in financial difficulties. Through Máscara Solidária (Solidary Mask), which consisted of the making and selling of non-surgical social masks by the clients and workers of a Community Centre, it was possible to buy fresh products such as yogurt, meat, fish, vegetables and fruits for selected families in need. At the same time, Somos Família (We Are Family) aimed to attract families from civil society that “adopted” families in need and to whom they delivered monthly a basket filled with essential products⁹⁵.

The Lithuanian Association of Emotional Support Services noticed an increased level of anxiety and a pick in support requests. Their organisational challenge was to start providing telephone-based emotional support services partly from home (which had not been possible before). In this case, the challenge was transformed in an opportunity to revise the provision of services.

ConfCooperative transformed 3 hotels in the Bergamo province, adapted to accommodate the people discharged from the hospitals, just after them are stabilized, so as to free up beds in the hospital facilities. This service allowed to welcome about 500 people in 9 weeks of activity.

AFedemy, in cooperation with the Hague Municipality, developed a unique default questionnaire to validate among the older citizens the age-friendliness of the environments in the city.

Training activities were reported by several CSOs, either directed to workers, users or member organisations. For example, Pellervo Coop provided training for SME cooperatives: social media, digital communication, finance, with participants from 30 different cooperatives. Caritas Viseu reported the dimension of burnout caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the use of clarification sessions,

⁹³ European Food Banks Federation (2020), Present challenges and urgent needs of European Food Banks due to COVID-19, April 2020, available at: https://lp.eurofoodbank.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/FEBA_Report_Survey_COVID_April2020.pdf.

⁹⁴ European Food Banks Federation (2020), European Food Banks in a post COVID-19 Europe, July 2020, available at: https://lp.eurofoodbank.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/FEBA_Report_Survey_COVID_July2020.pdf

⁹⁵ Cáritas Diocesana de Coimbra website, news on Máscara Solidária, available at <https://caritascoimbra.pt/2020/noticias/mascara-solidaria-excede-expectativas-com-o-apoio-de-parceiros-e-da-comunidade/>

individualized follow-up and group sessions to discuss new strategies in the field of mental health, both for employees and users.

PRAKSIS supported the infrastructure of 120 places established by the Athens Municipality in order to facilitate the needs of homeless people in Athens during the lockdown (and after) and provide them with holistic support (accommodation included), namely provision of staff (medical, administrative, social workers), sharing and implementing of protocols, support in social intakes, referrals and street work.

Imkaan informed in the survey of an increased activity in **strategic advocacy** with government departments and local government, specifically advocating on behalf of beneficiaries and members, increasing also the CSO capacity for policy work.

3.3.6.5 Conclusions

Social economy, being a wide and varied field, brings to the table a number of challenges, needs and areas to be tackled, such as a huge increase of **loneliness and isolation**, racism and **discrimination**, as well as sharpened **inequalities and impoverishment**. Several CSOs stepped in delivering aid to those who lack other forms of social protection, but also searched for alternative financial products and measures to facilitate the survival of social economy enterprises.

Two areas were highlighted in the consultation and desk search carried out in this study:

1. **Digitalisation** is a transversal theme referred to in the challenges, needs and initiatives. Several organisations used digital means and tools to provide their services and develop initiatives and this was therefore something referred as an opportunity. However, CSOs also report the need to invest in equipment and infrastructure, which requires support measures and funding lines. Moreover, training for professionals, actions of literacy in several areas, for citizens in general and for specific publics, with targeted information, were also reported as hindering factors for a proper use of technologies, and therefore increased the digital divide.
2. One other main aspect relates to actions of **advocacy for the protection and promotion of the most fragile** in society. Such actions are reported amongst the initiatives that responded to the pandemic, with the main aim to maintain and increase the **societal agenda at the top of the priorities**, namely by promoting awareness-raising campaigns to gather wide public support and ensuring the creation of the necessary channels to policy makers, especially during the forthcoming financial crisis.

3.3.7 Others

This section reports about the initiatives put forward by those CSOs whose representatives did not recognize their organization as belonging or potentially connected to any of the EESC Diversity Group areas. The three members of EESC Group I and II that participated in the study have ticked this category.

3.3.7.1 Stakeholder consultation

The category “Others” gathered 8 answers in the survey, 4 of which EESC members (1 in Group I, 1 in Group II and 2 in Group III). They include trade unions and trade associations, employer and industrial associations, CSOs connected to education, such as a Third Age university, public health and one aimed at the touristic sector and are distributed by seven European countries.

3.3.7.2 Main challenges reported

Although the respondents have not self-classified themselves as belonging to any of the EESC areas, most of the challenges they have reported are clearly similarly or in line with those raised the other respondents.

In particular, according to the respondents representing employers' organisations, many businesses have partially or totally closed during the confinement period, having **huge losses of sales and revenue**. Many will never reopen and those who did, have serious breaks in activity due to the safety precautions. Plenty have used lay-off and other extraordinary measures to avoid firing workers, but the continuity of the containment measures will hinder a sustainable recovery of the businesses.

The introduction of **new forms of employment** such as teleworking and the increase of part-time jobs also implied an additional load for organisations and companies.

The implementation of health and safety protocols, as well as the regular control hygiene measures implied an added burden, either in terms of procedures, as well as to labour costs and the non-labour costs (individual protection equipment, for example), especially due to the increase of the prices of products relevant to hygiene and safety (mask, antiseptic, COVID-19 tests).

In a societal perspective, main challenges are reported in relation to the **huge burden posed by the pandemic on the health system** such as the increased negative outcome risk (death, complications, hospitalisation) by COVID-19, worsening of existing disease and new development of disease and the postponement of urgent interventions, such as the start of dialysis or transplantation as well as the increase of unemployment, emphasized by one organisation of Group II, thus representing the workers' perspectives. The increase of domestic violence during the lockdown and the difficulties faced by undocumented migrants without any unemployment benefit and health protection are also cited.

3.3.7.3 Highlights of successful practices

In line with the challenges exposed above, the main initiatives to be highlighted in the "Other" activity area pertain to either health and healthcare focused organisations or labour and employers' organisations.

In the health sector, notable **advocacy activities and policy influence efforts** have been put in place by networks such as the European Kidney Diseases Alliance (EKHA) and the European Chronic Diseases Alliance. Their representative has participated in the hearing of the 'Expert Panel on effective ways of investing in health' held by the Commission during which EKHA has presented⁹⁶ a position paper on the heavy toll taken by Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) patients as a result of the outbreak, the lessons learnt from this crisis and potential solutions to improve kidney care in the context of healthcare systems resilience. At the ground national level, an example of proactive reaction is provided by the non-profit association "House Hospital Onlus" in Italy that has been collaborating with Local Health Agency Naples 3 (ASL NA 3) in order to **strengthen services to frail older adults and oncological patients**. The employers' perspective has been brought into light by the Confederation of Trade and Services in Portugal (CCP) and the Cyprus Employers & Industrialists Federation (OEB), the latter belonging to EESC Group I. Similarly to what has been done by the SMEs' organisations mentioned above, both organisations have reported that they have launched a **phone assistance service providing advisory support** services to businesses regarding the Economic/Work Support Schemes, the new COVID-19 related regulations, directives, health and safety protocols, measures and other labour/business issues as well as intensified their online information activities through their websites, newsletters and social media channels.

⁹⁶ European Kidney Health Alliance (2020) input for "The Expert Panel on effective ways of investing in health" In contribution to "A framework for resilient organisation of health and social care following the covid-19 pandemic", available at http://ekha.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020-09-EKHA-input-sustainable-health_DEF.pdf

On the other hand, the Group II member who joined the study brought in the perspectives of workers’ organisations and reported from Cyprus an interesting example of policy influence and lobbying to obtain **legislative protection for workers** in the new forms of employment such as telework that is further illustrated in section 3.4

3.3.7.4 Conclusions

The main conclusions to be retrieved from the organisations not included in the six categories of the EESC Diversity Group are aligned with those previously reported and do not imply any further consideration.

3.4 Societal impacts of the new or adapted activities and initiatives put in place by the CSOs

Only 27% of the respondents reported they have been monitoring the impact of their new or adapted activities on their respective recipients, which reiterates somehow the general lack of resources, as well-established impact assessment systems and methods usually require specialized competences and effort and are rarely put in place by small and local organizations. It is not a surprise that among the most common indicators used, the highest ranked are those relatively easier to calculate, such as the number of members or users reached out by direct support measures, the number of requests for support received and the number of followers on social media, closely followed by the number of people engaged in consultations and the number of visits to the organisations’ websites. For the ones that created campaigns for awareness raising or to raise additional resources, the reaction from society or from policy makers, as well as media coverage, were the most frequent “sign” to measure achievement. Nevertheless, none of the respondents have provided reports and sources on such measures and indicators. The reasons are mainly rooted in two aspects: smaller organisations have no resources to carry on systematic tracking and analytical tasks while the biggest networks have declared they are still elaborating data and information collected and the results are not publicly disclosed yet.

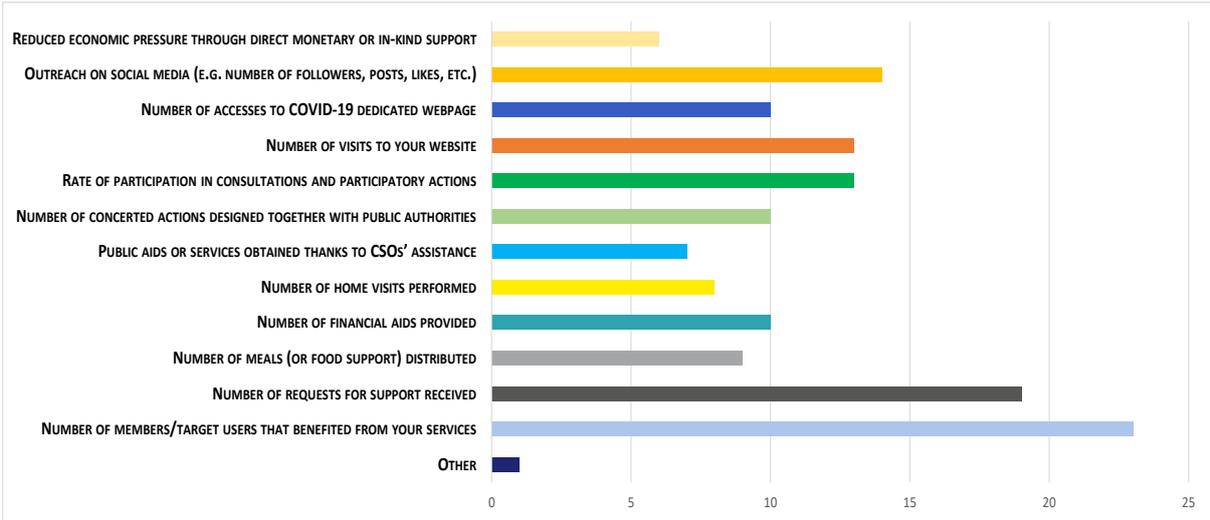


Figure 8. Indicators used to measure the impact of CSOs actions

However, when asked about the numbers of users that have been reached out by or benefitted of their initiatives, 92 out of 112 respondents have been able to provide estimations that serve to draw a picture of the overall type and size of organisations that are being most active in the pandemic response. More than half of the respondents have declared that their newly implemented activities have had the capacity

to reach either between 1 and 100 people (27%) and between 101 and 1000 (27%), those ranges being typical of small sized organisations operating at local or regional level. The rest of respondents declared their initiatives have benefited between 1.001 and 10.000 people (13%), between 10.001 and 100.000 (12%) and between 100.001 and 1.000.000 (10%). Only 3% of the CSOs (representing EU-wide networks and national social economy confederations) participating in the survey declared their initiatives were capable to reach more than 1.000.000 of users or members.

Similarly to impact, only 42% of the CSOs stated they are monitoring satisfaction of their users. In a few situations, specific evaluation/monitoring was performed and is reported with quantitative results: for example, the time of response was measured, user satisfaction was assessed (e.g. after the conclusion of an online training or informative session, as reported by the European Social Action Network (ESAN)) and the number of actions (e.g. number of calls, number of donations) was registered.

Regarding the perception of success of the initiatives implemented, only one respondent considered the reported initiative as not achieved. It was the case of a policy influence activity that did not progress as expected, which was the formal issuing of a Ministerial Decree. On the contrary, other respondents have highlighted cases of successful policy influence, which are summarised in the subsequent paragraph.

All the other initiatives presented in the following section were considered as successful by their promoters.

From an overall qualitative assessment of the descriptive responses where the participants described the reasons why they assessed their initiative as successful, it is possible to perceive the following:

- In most of the situations, the initiative intended to find means, tools or methods to provide the existing services in an alternative modality, e.g., psychological support provided by videoconference; information to members provided by phone, videocall or through online tools; facilitating family connections, among others. In these situations, the suitable solution was identified and put in place, even if some of the promoters stress the need to increase broadband connectivity (internet coverage in rural areas, for example), digital literacy and awareness on existing tools for online communication.
- For services connected to social aid or support to certain professional classes, in many cases, there was a raise in the demand, which even implied a bigger investment on resources (e.g., on human resources for services working 7/7; on collecting more food or money donations for support to persons who lost their jobs or found themselves in problematic financial situations).
- For new activities, the indicators for success were more varied: for example, for those CSOs who installed hospitals or medical services, the low or inexistent number of casualties was considered as a metric for success.
- On the area of research, new data collected and publicly shared or new instruments developed under this framework are also reported as a positive outcome. Research activities have been undertaken by both organisations which were used to perform studies and release reports and organisations that did not have such type of activities in their original scope.

From farmers' associations to women rights' activist groups, it is visible a tremendous **capacity of quick reaction and adaptation to remote work**, although scrambling with limited resources which has been affecting more the small and local organisations than the well-established national organisations and international networks. The outbreak-induced necessity to work from home has removed, at least temporarily, many of the barriers to telework.

However, CSOs are also playing a key role in **claiming that teleworking is still not for everybody**. According to a new report by the JRC and Eurofound⁹⁷, scientists warn about the emergence of a new divide and the possibility that teleworking may also exacerbate existing gender divides, notably on working mothers.

National research examples⁹⁸ and expert opinions⁹⁹ as well as international organizations such as UNESCO¹⁰⁰ have raised particular concerns about the consequences of school closure for children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds with data clearly showing that pupils from advantaged backgrounds receive more parental support, have better connectivity available at home and more resources (e.g., own computer) for home-schooling. Similarly, their parents have on average lower digital literacy skills to support them. Several CSOs have **settled intervention to support the educational system** in the production of materials, training teachers and pupils with basic IT competences and equipping economically disadvantaged families with devices for distance learning.

Services sectors have been heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Tourism, transport and distribution services, for example, have suffered as a result of mobility restrictions and social distancing measures imposed for public health reasons. Confinement measures have moved consumers further online, changed their demands and exacerbated behavioural biases. This leads to a massive crisis impact small commerce's, arts & crafts, family businesses and SMEs that were not prepared to a smooth and quick shift to e-commerce as well as increasing reports of unfair, misleading and fraudulent commercial practices online which urge consumers' associations and networks to **strive for more protective measures to safeguard consumers' health and safety**.

On another note, the **continued pressure and advocacy work of consumers organisations and environmental CSOs** has recently played an important role in making a focus on green stimulus packages emerge in many regions as governments recognize that rebuilding green can spur economic and job growth and create a more resilient system. The EU has already confirmed¹⁰¹ the health crisis won't stop Europe from developing bolder 2030 climate targets, and that green finance will be a key focus of the post-recovery phase. This is a relevant note that will further be explored in section 4.2.6.

As Civil Society Europe reported, CSOs across Europe are playing a "watchdog" role by monitoring the policy development" and calling for policy changes and legislation adjustments, whereas the impact of decisions to contain the pandemic and calling for changes appear to be disproportionate or unjustified. Some examples of successful **policy influence actions** have been brought to the attention of this study team by the survey respondents and are presented hereby.

In this regard, it is interesting to see how civic legal and policy "watch" initiatives such as the European Center for Not-for-Profit Law Stichting (ECNL) based in The Hague are warning on how CSOs can use EU law to safeguard access to funding which is considered a "a core component of the right to freedom

⁹⁷ Sostero M., Milasi S., Hurley J., Fernández-Macías E., Bisello M. (2020), Teleworkability and the COVID-19 crisis: a new digital divide?, Seville: European Commission, 2020, JRC121193. Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/sites/jrcsh/files/jrc121193.pdf>.

⁹⁸ Bol, T. (2020). Inequality in homeschooling during the Corona crisis in the Netherlands. First results from the LISS Panel. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/hf32q>.

⁹⁹ Van Lancker, W., & Parolin, Z. (2020). COVID-19, school closures, and child poverty: a social crisis in the making. *The Lancet. Public health*, 5(5), e243–e244. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(20\)30084-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(20)30084-0)

¹⁰⁰ UNESCO website, "Adverse consequences of school closures", at: <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/consequences>.

¹⁰¹ European Commission (2020) "President von der Leyen's State of the Union Address: charting the course out of the coronavirus crisis and into the future", Press Release, 16 September 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1657.

of association” by OSCE¹⁰², as adequate resources are obviously essential to the existence and effective operations of any organisation.

With regard to vulnerable and particularly disabled people, Inclusion Europe submitted a Petition at the PETI Committee (No 0470/2020) on the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities in the COVID-19 crisis, which resulted in a Resolution adopted by European Parliament (2020/2680(RSP))¹⁰³.

Other examples that are worth to note belong to the sphere of financial legislations, aids and tax regulations. The most relevant activity carried out by CEPES (Spain) has been to allow social economy enterprises to call for Temporary Employment Regulation (*Expediente de regulación temporal de Empleo, ERTE*). In a first moment, ERTE procedures were not applicable to social economy enterprises, and this problem was fixed after a legal proposal of CEPES in front of the Spanish Government. Similarly, lobbying activities toward the government reported by the Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners in Finland were successful in getting more advantageous financial assistance for entrepreneurs who suffered for the COVID-19 crisis. Relevant noteworthy examples have been provided also by some EESC members from Group II, such as the Pancyprian Federation of Labour (PEO) that has engaged in a campaign to promote a new law concerning the protection of the workers in the new forms of employment such as telework. The Ministry of Labour has prepared a draft legislation still pending for approval, although remote working has been applied, where applicable, throughout the public sector and among local authorities since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and the pressures from civil society have made possible its extension for certain groups (groups facing high risk and parents of children under the age of 15).

From the non-EU countries, other cases of successful legal initiatives were referred to tax reliefs. For instance, the Ukrainian Chamber of Tax Advisers played an important role in shaping the Business Support Law so as to allow full deductibility for Ukrainian taxpayers on donations made to non-profit organisations or medical institutions with the aim to prevent the spread of COVID-19 within Ukraine. Such donations may include funds, medicines, disinfection products, medical equipment, protective equipment, expendable materials, reagents, food, other equipment or materials as per the list approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. Earlier, taxpayers were allowed to deduct these donations for tax purposes only in the amount of up to 4% of their taxable profit for the previous year.

¹⁰² OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) (2015), Guidelines on Freedom of Association, OSCE/ODIHR 2015 ISBN 978-92-9234-906-6. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/3/b/132371.pdf>.

¹⁰³ European Parliament resolution of 8 July 2020 on the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities and their families in the COVID-19 crisis (2020/2680(RSP)). Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0183_EN.html.

4. Recommendations

In June 2020, the EESC adopted a resolution containing its “Proposal for post-COVID-19 crisis reconstruction and recovery”¹⁰⁴. According to this document, the pandemic brought a key moment to re-think, restructure and improve society, not only to tackle the negative effects visible in the short-term and, thus, this process “will have to be based on the principles underpinning all our work: protecting human and social rights, democratic values and the rule of law, unlock the full potential of the Single Market, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), creating a circular economy and achieving climate neutrality in the EU by 2050 at the latest. We must also ensure good governance and democratic accountability. It is also imperative to understand why certain social groups were left more vulnerable during the crisis, both in terms of insufficient protection against contagion and loss of livelihood, and to work to limit such vulnerability going forward.”

The report “The Future of Civil Society Organisations” released by a group of leaders of civil society networks and platforms and coordinated by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)¹⁰⁵ goes in the same direction, stating that “the current challenges and opportunities brought by the COVID-19 pandemic call for a conversation over the transformations we want to see in society, and in the humanitarian, social justice and environmental sector. (...) If civil society is challenged, so are democracy and participatory decision-making; if civil society is challenged, so are equality, social cohesion and non-discrimination; if civil society is challenged, so are transparency and accountability, especially as regards those in position of power. That cannot be allowed.”

The present study, even though focusing on certain segments of civil society, allows to reaffirm that CSOs have played and are playing an essential role in addressing and mitigating the short- and long-term impacts of the pandemic, namely complementing public services and the government action in an innovative and flexible way (63 out of the 76 participants who completed all the survey sections, i.e. 83% stated that they either agree or strongly agree that the CSOs are playing a critical role in the national response to COVID-19, as depicted in Figure 9 below).

This last section takes stock of the information collected and the relevant conclusions drawn by other studies published in the last months and summarizes the arguments supporting the central role of civil society organisations, not only in the immediate response but also to “reshape the post-crisis economy by promoting inclusive and sustainable economic models”¹⁰⁶

First, the authors identify key areas for reflection on the future of European CSOs departing from the ground considerations that can be drawn from the survey results’ analysis, in addition to the review of some specific and relevant literature sources.

Second, a set of policy recommendations for the European institutions and governments is proposed and argued with the overall aim to highlight that “only a holistic response based on cross-sectoral collaboration at all levels of society can build adaptive capacity to respond to the immediate and long-term effects of COVID-19”¹⁰⁷. Such response is ultimately viable, only if policy-making shifts to

¹⁰⁴ EESC (2020), EESC proposals for post-COVID-19 crisis reconstruction and recovery: “The EU must be guided by the principle of being considered a community of common destiny.” Resolution based on the work of the Subcommittee on post-COVID-19 recovery and reconstruction, adopted on 11th June 2020. Available at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/documents/resolution/eesc-proposals-post-covid-19-crisis-reconstruction-and-recovery-eu-must-be-guided-principle-being-considered-community#downloads>.

¹⁰⁵ ICVA (2020), The Future of Civil Society Organisations, May 2020, available at: https://www.icvanetwork.org/system/files/versions/Futures_Civil_Society_articles_2.pdf.

¹⁰⁶ OECD (2020). Social economy and the COVID-19 crisis: current and future roles, available at <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/social-economy-and-the-covid-19-crisis-current-and-future-roles-f904b89f/>.

¹⁰⁷ Oosterhof P.D. (2020), The 2030 Agenda as Blueprint for a Post-COVID World, 1 Oct 2020, Commentary for the SDG Knowledge Hub managed by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD). Available at: <http://sdg.iisd.org/commentary/guest-articles/the-2030-agenda-as-blueprint-for-a-post-covid-world/>.

governance systems that are guided by a whole-of-society approach and inclusive, participatory, and partnership decision-making processes are adopted.

4.1 Key areas for reflections

In the fourth and last section of the survey administered to the CSOs participating in this study, the respondents have been asked to express their opinions regarding the future of their organizations and, overall, the upcoming transformation that is likely to impact civil dialogue and participatory democracy. A series of statements have been proposed to the CSOs seeking to gather their position in relation to them. Matching the collected answers (76 organizations out of the total of 112 participants have completed this part of the survey, see Figure 9) with the desk search findings, it is possible to cluster two main areas as relevant for analysis and for future reflections as follows:

- Threats to the future role of CSOs in participatory democracy and their capacity to advocate for human and basic rights;
- Challenges that could hamper the CSOs’ ability to recover from the crisis and be sustainable over time imperilling their capacity to protect the most fragile from social exclusion and poverty. .

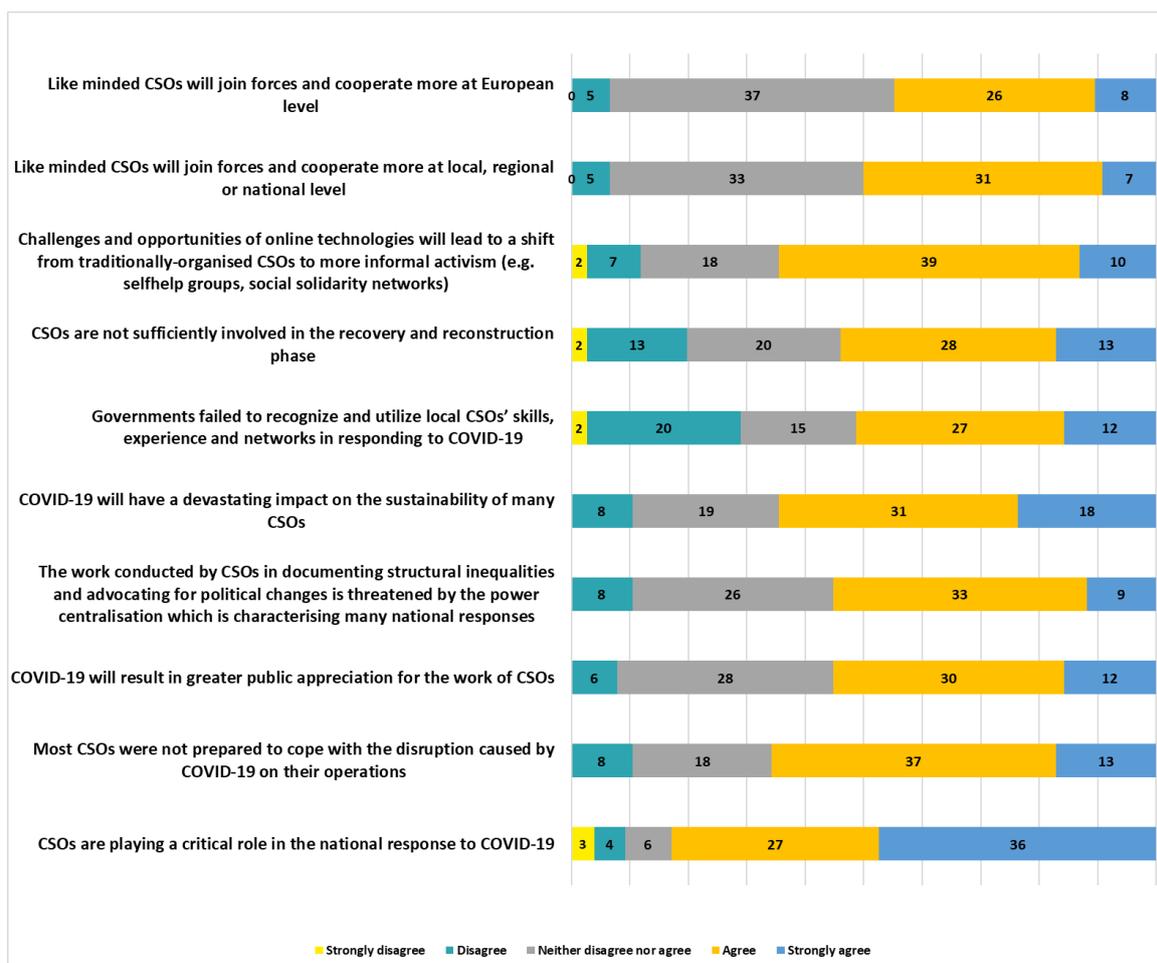


Figure 9. Opinions and positions expressed by the study participants on a set of statements about the future of CSOs

4.1.1 Threats to the future role of CSOs in participatory democracy and their capacity to advocate for human and basic rights

The first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Spring 2020 has made evident, in most countries, that “a sense of emergency has a direct result on motivation and willingness to help”, as reported by the EESC study *Finding a new consensus on European civil society values and their evaluation*¹⁰⁸. Many CSOs reported being approached in greater numbers than usual by people offering to help, donate or volunteer and the above-mentioned study even reports that “the profound and sudden impact of the Coronavirus on all European societies has had the effect of replacing divisive talk about immigration and other hot-button topics, allowing a less highly-charged and confrontational debate to emerge”.

However, with the second wave of the pandemic currently ongoing as the present document is drafted, the same conclusions cannot be fully applicable anymore. The study previously referred already predicted that populism would remain an extensive challenge and this is being confirmed as the year of 2020 reaches its end. The catastrophic impact of the containment measures in many vital sectors of the economy, namely on the capacity of companies and organisations to remain open and labouring and the effects on employment, is hindering social consensus. There have been protests and demonstrations around Europe against responses to the pandemic by governmental bodies and many populist replies¹⁰⁹, including several based on racist and discriminatory ideologies and principles attempting against basic human rights, such as not considering the rights of all to adequate healthcare provision.

The caring context that was predominant during the first wave period is no longer cohesive and a fundamental division is being created in several countries, between health provision and economic survival, but this seems not to be duly supported by objective data: “...among countries with available GDP data, we do not see any evidence of a trade-off between protecting people’s health and protecting the economy. Rather the relationship we see between the health and economic impacts of the pandemic goes in the opposite direction. As well as saving lives, countries controlling the outbreak effectively may have adopted the best economic strategy too¹¹⁰”. However, the message is often shared in non-objective ways and the societal agenda is being threatened by the desire to rescue economy, prevent poverty and decrease unemployment.

Furthermore, not all democratic regimes across Member States are identical and there are a few hostile reactions to CSOs being critical towards the government, this being a connotation of the pre-pandemic political context which still persists. According to a report from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)¹¹¹ well before the global crisis COVID-19 entailed, media reports were suggesting an “increase in negative public and political discourse against CSOs and activists in a number of countries. This includes belittling CSOs or accusing them of allegedly serving as people smugglers, undermining security, or acting as foreign agents”¹¹².

Even when this is not the case, despite the essential role of CSOs, the huge differences in terms of political influence, lobbying and networking capacity due to the variety of the organized civil society

¹⁰⁸ EESC (2020). “Finding a new consensus on European civil society values and their evaluation”, available at <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/publications-other-work/publications/finding-new-consensus-european-civil-society-values-and-their-evaluation-study>.

¹⁰⁹ Henley J. (2020), Latest coronavirus lockdowns spark protests across Europe, The Guardian, 2 Nov 2020, at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/02/latest-coronavirus-lockdowns-spark-protests-across-europe>

¹¹⁰ Our world in data (2020). Which countries have protected both health and the economy in the pandemic?, available at <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-health-economy>

¹¹¹ FRA (2017), Challenges facing civil society organisations working on human rights in the EU, doi:10.2811/287081, available at: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2018-challenges-facing-civil-society_en.pdf.

¹¹² Consiliul National al Audivizualului (2017), Decizia nr. 37 din 31.01.2017.

landscape very often implies a lack of representation/visibility, when compared to other established stakeholders in the European landscape. At the level of the European institutions, relevant initiatives keep working to improve such unbalance, such as the Policy Forum on Development (PFD), a multi-stakeholder space for dialogue on EU development policy established by the European Commission and including in its membership 75 CSOs and associations of local authorities (ALAs), carrying out research to understand how development cooperation, specifically its work in support to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is affected by COVID-19¹¹³. There are also a number of relevant initiatives reported by the participants of the survey (cfr. Section 3.4) and at the national level, several Member States have established mechanisms for different types of consultations and engagement with CSOs, including specific legislative or policy proposals but also broader cooperation, as reported in this country-specific bulletins¹¹⁴ compiled by the European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG), i.e. the Council of Europe intergovernmental forum where representatives of the Member States meet to exchange and follow up on the state of democratic governance in Europe. However, this practice is not identical among Member States and some of these participatory roles have been actually abolished in the last years, taking as examples Poland and the Netherlands, in the areas of minorities and discrimination¹¹⁵. This is corroborated by the consultation held under this study, as 51% of the respondents consider that “governments failed to recognize and utilize local CSOs’ skills, experience and networks in responding to COVID-19” and 55% refer that “the works conducted by CSOs in documenting structural inequalities and advocating for political changes is threatened by the power centralisation which is characterising many national responses” (Figure 9).

Especially when compared to the industrial actors, the influence that CSOs can gather as a sector is insufficient and this is a **genuine threat to the right of participation in public affairs, namely to civil participation**, defined as “the engagement of individuals, NGOs and civil society at large in decision-making processes by public authorities”, as recognised in Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights¹¹⁶ and recently reaffirmed in the Council of Europe Guidelines for civil participation in political decision-making¹¹⁷, as well as in article 15, n. 1. of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, that states: “In order to promote good governance and ensure the participation of civil society, the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies shall conduct their work as openly as possible.”¹¹⁸.

It is important to state that the intrinsic value of civil society is attributed to its mission and power to mobilise citizens and communities to support social causes.

The Coronavirus pandemic involves both human rights and ethical and political responsibilities. A range of human rights that need to be taken into account include our right to health, but also a right to freedom and movement, to education, to information, to shelter. As countries ramp up exclusionary travel and border policies, some of these rights (e.g. right to circulate) may be imperilled, and governments need

¹¹³ European Commission Policy Forum on Development (PFD) (2020), 2020 PFD Consultation: responses on COVID-19, available at: <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/policy-forum-development/wiki/analysis-pfd-members-responses-covid-19>.

¹¹⁴ Council of Europe website, European Committee on Democracy and Governance and COVID-19, at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/good-governance/cddg-and-covid#%7B%2264787140%22%3A%5B%5D%7D>.

¹¹⁵ FRA (2018). Challenges facing civil society organisations working on human rights in the EU, available at https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2018-challenges-facing-civil-society_en.pdf.

¹¹⁶ United Nations, Officer of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (1966), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx>

¹¹⁷ CoE, Committee of Ministers (2017), Guidelines for civil participation in political decision making, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 27 September 2017 at the 1295th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies.

¹¹⁸ European Union (2008), Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:12008E015:EN:HTML>

to strike a balance between protecting health and respecting human rights¹¹⁹. In this regard, 32% of the respondents to the survey considered that the special legislations to authorise rapid actions pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic adopted in the country/countries where their organization operate had negative effects on the capacity of CSOs to promote rights and democracy. One relevant example in this direction is the Joint Position Paper¹²⁰ subscribed by several European networks, such as FEANTSA and Cáritas Europa, where they report that the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare and exacerbated many of these challenges and that, for instance, social service providers, workers and people using these services have been largely voiceless during the pandemic.

In this context, there have been a plethora of voices calling the attention of the governments to those risks endangering human rights, such as the United Nations that called upon all States to ensure that all human rights were respected, protected, and fulfilled while combating the pandemic and that their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic were in full compliance with their human rights obligations and commitments¹²¹.

The recommendations in this study address this threat and aim to foster the maintenance and even the increase of civil participation.

These forecasts make even more important to secure mechanisms for governments' accountability and open and transparent decision-making processes, allowing CSOs' to keep their role of vigilant actors safeguarding rights and nurturing an open civic space, which is the utmost condition for lively democracies to progress.

4.1.2 Challenges that could hamper the CSOs' ability to recover from the crisis and be sustainable over time imperilling their capacity to protect the most fragile from social exclusion and poverty

Whereas it will be surely the subject of further debates and reflections whether COVID-19 has presented an existential threat to civil society's relevance and legitimacy, it is a broadly recognized fact that "civil society, from local to international levels, is often the first responder in situations of emergency, including public health emergencies, natural disasters and human induced humanitarian crises, including those caused by conflict. [...] However, sometimes, despite its best efforts, civil society is overwhelmed by the scale of the crisis too"¹²².

In this regard, 64,5% of the respondents to the survey either agreed or strongly agreed that it is going to have a devastating impact on the sustainability of many CSOs.

The funding of CSOs is indeed quite unstable, as the sources that they can take advantage of are not very diverse and, as stated by the survey respondents, they are heavily dependent upon donations, membership fees and European funding. A recent study from Forus¹²³, which corroborates these results, adds that most of the platforms and networks rely largely or exclusively on EU funding and the smaller national CSO platforms rely on member fees, that vary "according to the local civil society context, including factors such as the political and funding environment". Moreover, some of these organisations avoid mandatory fees to prevent members from feeling obliged to contribute. This is of course a

¹¹⁹ Harvard Kennedy School (2020). How the public sector and civil society can respond to the coronavirus pandemic, available at <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/faculty-research/policy-topics/health/how-public-sector-and-civil-society-can-respond-coronavirus>

¹²⁰ FEANTSA et al. (2020), COVID-19 and Social Services: what role for the EU? Europe Expects Recognition, Urgency, Resilience, Joint Position Paper, https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/News/joint_position_paper_1.pdf

¹²¹ UNHR (2020). COVID-19 Guidance, available at https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Events/COVID-19_Guidance.pdf

¹²² CIVICUS (2016), The State of Civil Society 2015. The Year in Review. Available at: <https://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/SOCS/2015/summaries/StateOfCivilSocietyFullReport2015.pdf>.

¹²³ Funding Civil Society Organisations & Networks (2019), Promising approaches to financing development in the 21st Century, available at <https://forus-international.org/en/resources/71>.

challenge to stability of resources, capacity for investments and for sustainability in times of social and economic crisis.

If CSOs that provide services to users in subsidiarity from the State (e.g., social care or health services) can more often have stable funding from the public budget, the CSOs that are mostly connected to advocacy and human rights usually prefer not to accept government funds to maintain their independence and neutrality. According to one of the EESC studies, “several organisations in Italy and Greece reported that they have to depend on project-based funding more than they would like. This type of funding is problematic because it means they only have time to chase short-term projects rather than focusing on their long-term goals. Funding often comes with conditions that *de facto* determine the whole organisation’s work.”¹²⁴. The funding difficulties were referred in section 3 and their impacts were directly felt by several CSOs that struggled with severe difficulties to face the emerging needs coming from the COVID-19 restriction measures, either to acquire new digital tools, protective equipment, or even the lack of direct revenues to face monthly expenses. In line with this, when asked about the main threats that can hamper the existence of their organization, the loss of funding was the top ranked threat (12,5%) followed by the reduced face-to-face community interaction (12.1%) and the extent of the reduced and cancelled operations due to COVID-19 (9,7%).

Stable funding, allowing for long term planning, flexibility and certainty, is thus a critical point for CSOs’ sustainability and one major risk for imperilling their capacity to protect the most fragile from social exclusion and poverty.

Moreover, the pandemic can be misused by governments to undermine the role of CSOs. The above mentioned FRA report relates an “emerging narrative distinguishing ‘good’ versus ‘bad’ CSOs. This in particular affects CSOs working on human rights issues (advocacy or litigation), putting them against service providing CSOs, which are often depicted as ‘genuinely useful’ or ‘good’ CSOs in the public discourse”¹²⁵.

This discourse does not recognise the **capacity demonstrated by several CSOs**, including several among the participants to the present study, **to offer multiple forms of response simultaneously**, and it could potentially offer a partial explanation to the fact that only 42 out of 76 CSOs agreed that COVID-19 will result in a greater public appreciation for their work. As the recent report from CIVICUS acknowledges¹²⁶, “they were effective precisely because they combined different responses, such as providing essential goods and services to communities, sharing information and advocating towards states for rights, and in connecting these responses, they used a variety of tactics”.

In summary, the main societal challenge to be tackled will most likely be connected to the increase of poverty and the enormous inequalities arising from it, which can be successfully addressed only with a combination of strategies. According to a study developed by UNI-WIDER¹²⁷, “COVID-19 poses a real challenge to the UN Sustainable Development Goal of ending poverty by 2030 because global poverty could increase for the first time since 1990 and, depending on the poverty line, such increase could represent a reversal of approximately a decade in the world’s progress in reducing poverty. In some regions the adverse impacts could result in poverty levels similar to those recorded 30 years ago. Under the most extreme scenario of a 20 per cent income or consumption contraction, the number of people

¹²⁴ EESC (2020) “Finding a new consensus on European civil society values and their evaluation”, available at <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/publications-other-work/publications/finding-new-consensus-european-civil-society-values-and-their-evaluation-study>

¹²⁵ FRA expert meeting, ‘Supporting an enabling and protective space for civil society’, Vienna, May 2017.

¹²⁶ CIVICUS (2020), Solidarity in the time of COVID-19. Civil Society Responses to the Pandemic, November 2020. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/solidarity-in-the-time-of-covid-19_en.pdf.

¹²⁷ UNI-WIDER (2020). Working Paper “Estimates of the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty”, available at <https://www.wider.unu.edu/publication/estimates-impact-covid-19-global-poverty>

living in poverty could increase by 420–580 million, relative to the latest official recorded figures for 2018.”

The answers of most of the CSOs to the survey developed under this study, especially those in the areas of Associational Life (cfr. Section 3.3.1) and Social Economy (cfr. 3.3.6), already anticipated this concern: **the huge increase of several inequalities, namely caused by poverty, discrimination and social exclusion will thus bring as one of the CSOs’ major roles to be the guardian of common good and social progress.**

4.2 Policy recommendations

In this section, departing from the results of the survey exposed at the webinar held with the Members of the Diversity Group Presidency, a series of actionable policy recommendations are formulated around the topics highlighted in the following figure:



Figure 10. Policy recommendations

4.2.1 Leverage and voice new solidarity and new form of social activism, while promoting links and cross-fertilisation mechanisms between newly emerged groups and established CSOs

“Since the pandemic started, we have seen neighbours smiling at each other, friends and family talking more often, communities supporting those hit hardest, supermarkets prioritizing vulnerable customers, children displaying teddy bears and rainbows in their windows, people and companies making masks and protective equipment, volunteers helping in foodbanks. This is how the future could look like: caring and supporting each other more – more solidarity”¹²⁸.

From the survey respondents and several search sources, it is clear that new solidarity circles and also new forms of civic activism that erupted during the pandemic are an opportunity to increase public awareness and engagement, as well as the democratic participation of citizens in selecting policy and investment priorities. Several of these movement networks also intend to address “democratic deficits

¹²⁸ Valls D. (2020), Activism in times of COVID-19: a time for change?, blog on Amnesty International website, 29 May 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2020/05/activism-in-times-of-covid-19/>.

in leadership and state response to the pandemic (e.g., solidarity networks¹²⁹; neighbourhood “mask brigades¹³⁰”; tracking apps to help contain the virus, movement online forums repurposed for corona-related activity etc.)¹³¹.

These new activism movements are informal and varied and often based on social media or informal digital tools. As they are rooted on common ideas (usually formulated in a simple and easy-to-understand manner) instead of formal organisation and administrative rules, they are easy to build, agile to respond and to rapidly swift or adapt depending on societal emergent needs. From the survey replies, it was brought forward that informal volunteering is “on the rise” and if some of the CSOs saw these movements as positive and even supported them by providing capacity-building and training, other see them as potentially harmful, as they often are not fully aware of liability or safety, for example with proper insurance for volunteers. Nevertheless, 65% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that “challenges and opportunities of online technologies will lead to a shift from traditionally organised CSOs to more informal activism (e.g. self-help groups, social solidarity networks)”, which foresees that this swift is already foreseen by the CSOs.

Being “digitally-rooted” in terms of aggregation of supporters and engagement¹³², these movements are often being preferred by many in detriment of the more traditional CSOs¹³³ and the integration of these two types of civic organisations benefit from being aligned, thus enhancing their mutual strength and advocacy capacity. As referred, the reaction of CSOs to the rise of informal volunteering and activism is diverse, but a first recommendation in terms of further action is directed to the CSOs in terms of fostering this collaboration and to EESC in terms of investigation, as the forms to leverage this opportunity are broad and this is thus a potential area for further study and developments.

Based on the outcomes of the consultation done to CSOs under this study, (cfr. conclusions of section 3.3.1) it was evident that gathering wide public support for the societal agenda and promoting effective awareness-raising campaigns was key in the pandemic period and will be even more essential for the mid- and long-term period to come. This will imply that CSOs are able to **rethink strategy and external communications**, as traditional CSOs can learn and evolve from youth activism and many of the emerging social movements. Communication needs to be timely, constant, engaging and simple. Digital tools are essential and social media need to be included as a major engagement resource. Several organisations reported this knowledge and used it in their answers to the survey (cfr. Sections 3.3.1.4 and 3.3.5.4 for example), but there is still room to evolve and CSOs, indifferent of size, need to have solid communication strategies and plans, with clear objectives and messages that can prove their value to the common citizen.

To this end, training is essential, mainly on more technical aspects as communication, strategic planning and digital tools; benchmarking and knowledge sharing between CSOs, between CSOs and informal movements, and also with commercial organisations that often can share their knowledge as part of social responsibility programmes are also very important practical measures to implement. Platforms and network CSOs are one of the actors that can provide this training and benchmark.

¹²⁹ Polyak L. (2020), From ACTIVE NGOs to solidarity networks: civic ecosystems during and after COVID-19, article on URBACT website, 18 June 2020, <https://urbact.eu/active-ngos-solidarity-networks-civic-ecosystems-during-and-after-covid-19>.

¹³⁰ Adams C. (2020), Mask Brigades Fill Gaps Amid State Failures During COVID-19 Crisis, article on People’s Health Movement website, 15 July 2020, <https://phm-na.org/2020/07/mask-brigades-fill-gaps-amid-state-failures-during-covid-19-crisis/>.

¹³¹ Social Movement Studies Journal, Special Issue on “Social Movements and Covid-19: Dynamics, challenges and strategies”, https://think.taylorandfrancis.com/special_issues/social-movements-and-covid-19-dynamics-challenges-and-strategies/.

¹³² Rosenblatt K. (2020), A summer of digital protest: How 2020 became the summer of activism both online and offline, 26 September 2020, article published on NBC News at <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/summer-digital-protest-how-2020-became-summer-activism-both-online-n1241001>

¹³³ EESC (2020), Finding a new consensus on European civil society values and their evaluation, Study published on 25th June 2020, doi: 10.2864/73724. Available at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/publications-other-work/publications/finding-new-consensus-european-civil-society-values-and-their-evaluation-study>.

In this context, this is thus an important role for umbrella CSOs and international organisations:

1. Recommendation to the EESC and international organisations: foster **strategic alignment and broad collaborative efforts between different types of civil society movements and organisations**

Divide and conquer is contrary to the basic roots of civil society. The work of CSOs, as well as the work of EESC and of several other international organisations with similar societal goals can only be leveraged with broad consensus and collaboration. During the pandemic many Opinion or Position Papers were delivered, as well as several policy recommendations that gathered support from different institutions. However, increased efforts can be done to ensure a more extensive strategic alignment within the European organisations that have as core mission the strengthening of the democratic legitimacy and of the role of civil society. The selection of 2-3 core objectives within an intersectional campaign that can be broadly supported and brought to the European Commission and Member States as being supported by millions of citizens and grassroots stakeholders will favour the negotiation power of the civil society and increase the inclusion of these concerns in policy implementation.

The first part of the recommendations is directed to the CSOs and their overarching representatives, which will have a crucial role at the ground level, to promote the cross-fertilisation and the creation of significant links between CSOs and other informal movements of the civil society, voicing the citizens as one.

However, even with this work being successful, there is still a gap towards the final objective if these voices are not heard and included in the political agenda. The political institutions also need to take the responsibility for the promotion of the social agenda and engage all civil society representatives as meaningful and empowered stakeholders in the construction of the future.

In this context, the following preliminary actions are recommended towards urgent implementation:

2. Recommendation to the European institutions and national governments: **prioritise human rights and the social contract as a key area** in the policy drafting for the Recovery Plans.

Despite the impacts of the pandemic in the economy and in the health and care provision in particular, the “obligations to respect human rights and the rule of law remain in place. This is not purely a legal requirement but a value-based approach which grounds the well-being of our societies”¹³⁴.

There will only be sustainability in a post-recovery plan if principles of trust, accountability and justice are deemed and protected as essential and a social transformation underlined this process. The crisis highlighted many of the system’s weaknesses and can be used as an opportunity to tackle these and strengthen the system in the long-term. Despite any short-term needs, the social contract¹³⁵ must be at the heart of any negotiations if a strong and fruitful recovery is desired. A full and constant representation of the civil society, in the drafting and implementation of the Recovery Plan¹³⁶ is highly recommended, both at the European as at the Member State level. Another perspective that reinforces this recommendation is further referred to in section 4.2.6, connected to sustainability and green policy.

In conclusion: advocacy for the protection and promotion of the most fragile in society, many of them with increased vulnerabilities due to the COVID-19 containment measures, is one essential aspect to be considered in the European Agenda. This implies the creation of the necessary channels to policy

UNDP (2020), Discussing Human Rights, Rule of Law and the renewed social contract in the COVID-19 reality, Posted on June 29, 2020, at: <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/news-centre/speeches/2020/human-rights-and-rule-of-law-.html>

¹³⁵ European Commission (2020), A strong social Europe for just transition, Brussels, 14 January 2020, COM(2020) 14 final, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/fs_20_49.

¹³⁶ European Commission, webpage illustrating the key component of the “Recovery Plan for Europe”, at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe_en.

makers, the need to keep the societal agenda at the top of the priorities and to gather wide public support, namely through increased awareness-raising campaigns, especially during the forthcoming financial crisis.

4.2.2 Tackle the risks and take advantage of the opportunities brought by digitalisation

COVID-19 has dramatically accelerated the adoption of digital technologies and tools across many sectors such as retail¹³⁷, financial services¹³⁸, education and healthcare and many organisations and businesses had to change their whole business model. Telemedicine and remote diagnostics are helping patients get medical advice and diagnoses at home, so that they don't need to come in to the doctor's office or hospital, and 3D printing is being used to expedite the production of critical medical supplies, such as personal protective equipment. In the absence of a vaccine or proven treatment, the best prevention strategy to contain the virus spread is digital contact tracing which has already been used to effectively slow the propagation in East Asia during the first wave.

When it comes to the organized civil society, the results of the survey which was the primary data collection method supporting this study, as well as several consultations run by international and national organisations, reveal that digital transition has been pivotal for the prosecution of the activities at all levels (with 74% of the participants declaring they have relied on digital technologies to put in place the novel services or initiatives they have illustrated in their responses), from information and documentation to training, education, awareness, counselling and professional support. Furthermore, a large majority of the respondents agreed that the fast spread of online technologies' use will be one of the factors contributing to the above-mentioned emergence of informal activism (e.g. self-help groups, etc.).

For all the above, the involvement of CSOs in this digitalisation movement is essential:

1. Recommendation to national and regional governments: **Guarantee a prominent involvement of civil society in the specification, design, development, and testing of technologies for crisis response** with a view to support democratic, inclusive, and transparent implementation.

Nevertheless, while many respondents emphasized their ability to reach people they would not have been able to reach before and the increased flexibility for staff as positive aspects of digitalisation, the shift to digital modalities unavoidably has also represented a huge hurdle to overcome for those CSOs, which services cannot be smoothly or 100% converted and for those that were not adequately prepared to embark in the fast adaptation that the COVID-19 containment measures have imposed worldwide. This is confirmed by the opinion expressed by the survey respondents who considered team and project management skills for online work (21,3%), as well as techniques and methods for effective building of online relationships with their audiences (17,6%) and online communication skills with the institutions and the wide public (15,2%), among the most important new skills their organizations would need to work in this changing environment.

Furthermore, the accelerated digital transformation has reiterated the urgency to address the well-known digital divide, which persists across the European population with regard to both the opportunities to access communication technologies and the skills to use them thus posing a high risk of broadening existing vulnerability gaps.

¹³⁷ Beżak T. (2020), How COVID-19 Accelerated Digital Transformation in the Retail Sector, 19 August 2020, at: <https://infinum.com/the-capsized-eight/COVID-19-digital-transformation>.

¹³⁸ Deloitte (2020), Realizing the digital promise. COVID-19 catalyzes and accelerates transformation in financial services, available at: <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/Financial-Services/gx-fsi-realizing-the-digital-promise-covid-19-catalyzes-and-accelerates-transformation.pdf>.

Experts across the globe are claiming that the unequal access to broadband connectivity means poor or no access to telemedicine, tele-schooling, work, job searches, food, social connections, and other services and goods essential to health, ultimately recognizing Internet access as a social determinant of wellbeing¹³⁹.

In order to tackle such negative effects and considering the numerous statements made by international networks, such as the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights¹⁴⁰, launched by the Cities of Amsterdam, Barcelona and New York in November 2018 and gathering today over 50 cities worldwide, and organisations, the following recommendations for the EU and national, regional and local governments emerge from the present study,:

2. Recommendation for the European institutions: **Promote the use of cohesion policy funds such as the European Social Fund to support digital literacy and training programmes for CSO workers and marginalised civil society groups**, in partnership with international CSOs and national networks, in line with the recent Council Conclusions on the Europe's Digital Future¹⁴¹ and the request posed by the EU Leaders participating in the special European Council meeting which took place on 1-2 October 2020¹⁴², who invited the Commission to present, by March 2021, a comprehensive Digital Compass which sets out the EUs concrete digital ambitions for 2030.
3. Recommendation for national and regional governments: **Unleash the potential role of structural funds for driving modernization in post-COVID-19**, by coordinating their use through national and regional operational programmes to support investments in digital infrastructure and digital equipment and tools for the organisations of the civil society.

4.2.3 Promote youth engagement and innovative programmes to encourage job creation linked to civic action

With the objective to mobilise all sectors of the populations against the threats of coronavirus spread, many governments have made special calls on youth to embrace the effort to protect themselves and the overall population. Youth are also in a position to help those who are most vulnerable, and to aid in increasing public health social awareness campaigns among their communities. Thus, youth are critical and part of the active plan to limit the virus's spread and its impact on public health, society, and the economy at large. Through voluntary initiatives, for instance, many young people have supported vulnerable members of their community, for example in the distribution of groceries and medicines.

This was the case highlighted in the survey consultation held under this study, by the Volunteer Center Augsburg (Germany), that started a call to action in the city and reached out 1.400 citizens willing to volunteer in this crisis. They matched those volunteers to citizens in need (doing shopping, visiting by phone, staying in contact, driving service) while other volunteers helped at service association for homeless people and at the food bank and, as they were overwhelmed with volunteering offers, they also started the brokerage to other associations who are in need of volunteers.

¹³⁶ Benda N. et al. (2020), "Broadband Internet Access Is a Social Determinant of Health", American Journal of Public Health 110, no. 8 (August 1, 2020): pp. 1123-1125. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2020.305784>

¹⁴⁰ Cities for Digital Rights (2020), CC4DR Position Statement & Recommendations: Safeguarding Digital Rights when Applying COVID-19 Related Technologies, available at: <https://citiesfordigitalrights.org/cc4dr-position-statement-recommendations-safeguarding-digital-rights-when-applying-covid-19-related>.

¹⁴¹ Council of the European Union (2020), Shaping Europe's Digital Future - Council Conclusions (9 June 2020), 8711/20, available at: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8711-2020-INIT/en/pdf>.

¹⁴² Special European Council meeting, 1-2 October 2020, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2020/10/01-02/>.

While the youth's response to such call for individual responsibility and social commitment is undoubtedly heart-warming, it is crucial to remind the unprecedented disadvantages that youth is likely to face in consequence of the pandemic if adequate and bold policies are not put in place.

According to a broad survey launched by OECD between 7-20 April 2020 with the participation of 90 youth-led organisations from 48 countries¹⁴³, youth organisations expressed greatest concern about the impact of COVID-19 on mental well-being, employment, income loss, disruptions to education, familial relations and friendships.

Prior to the onset of COVID-19, youth (aged 15 to 24) were indeed already three times more likely to be unemployed compared to adults, while 126 million young workers were in extreme and moderate poverty worldwide (International Labour Organization, 2020). Young workers are also more likely to be in precarious employment than other age groups. After the major surge in youth unemployment brought about by the global financial crisis in 2008, another dramatic trends of such magnitude due to COVID-19 pandemic could take a decade or more to heal. In Europe, youth unemployment has increased from 15 to 17% between February and September 2020, although measures of labour market slack for the young are up by some 5 percentage points, as are the percentages of young people who have even given up searching for a job. Some countries such as Spain or Croatia¹⁴⁴ are more severely hit. In fact, Spanish youth unemployment increased from an already high 32% in February to 40% in September while the Croatian rate increased from 17% to almost 24%. In the UK, youth unemployment rose from 11 to almost 14% in July. As Europe entered its second significant wave, the risk is that these numbers will rapidly deteriorate further.

Expert opinions¹⁴⁵ and international bodies, such as the Council of Europe¹⁴⁶, are thus warning European institutions and national governments to prevent the disastrous consequences of COVID-19 in terms of destroyed opportunities and unemployment for young people.

Based on the above, the following twofold recommendation calls for immediate and well-balanced actions from national governments and EU institutions:

1. Recommendations to national governments: **Consult and meaningfully engage youth in the development of health, economic, and social interventions in response to COVID-19 and in its recovery.**

Part of such meaningful involvement must build on actions aimed to incentivize youth innovation and creativity for the prevention and treatment of COVID-19 and the management of its corollary socioeconomic impacts both during the outbreak and in the post-pandemic reconstruction. Some promising examples can show the way forward such as the recent commitment expressed by the Prime Minister of the Netherlands to involving children, young people, and youth organisations in the design of recovery measures¹⁴⁷.

2. Recommendation to the European institutions: **Help protect youth's future by designing, developing and using proactively governance tools and pre- and post- assessment**

¹⁴³ OECD (2020), Youth and COVID-19: Response, recovery and resilience, 11 June 2020, available at: <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/youth-and-covid-19-response-recovery-and-resilience-c40e61c6/>

¹⁴⁴ EUROSTAT, Unemployment by sex and age – monthly data, data retrieved on the 23rd November 2020, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/UNE_RT_M_custom_188328/default/table?lang=en.

¹⁴⁵ Wolff G. (2020), COVID-19 could leave another generation of young people on the scrapheap, Opinion published on 12th Nov 2020, at: <https://www.bruegel.org/2020/11/covid-19-could-leave-another-generation-of-young-people-on-the-scrapheap/>.

¹⁴⁶ European Commission & Council of Europe (2020), Impact of COVID-19 on young people and on the youth sector, September 2020, available at: <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/72351197/YP+covid19+RAY.pdf/4f9f2fcf-e791-6778-e05f-9694d0e7ee3a>.

¹⁴⁷ Pieters, J. (2020), PM PRAISED FOR ASKING CHILDREN TO HELP SOLVE CORONAVIRUS PROBLEMS, <https://nltimes.nl/2020/05/20/pm-praised-asking-children-help-solve-coronavirus-problems..>

measures that can help policy makers allocate public resources for recovery in a fair manner across generations.

Mainstreaming intergenerational and long-term considerations in all government sectors and levels is fundamental to make our economy and society more resilient to future similar crisis that might heavily affect the wellbeing of next generations.

In conclusion, it is fundamental to place **intergenerational solidarity** at the centre of recovery plans and policies articulating the right positive messages towards the younger. Young people can act as a “connective tissue” in public institutions, decision-making processes and public consultations to bridge short-term concerns and long-term objectives and build more fair and inclusive policy outcomes and societal resilience¹⁴⁸. However, in order for the youth to feel the societal belonging required to play such role, intergenerational solidarity benefits must be adequately communicated and leverage so as to contrast the sentiments of intergenerational “injustices” that have often characterised political and media discourses recently¹⁴⁹.

4.2.4 Equip CSOs with the needed skills and resources to take the most advantage from networking, national and international cooperation

As referred in section 4.2.1., a broad and cross-sectorial collaboration in the advocacy level is one of the key recommendations to progress to a fairer Europe. In the first recommendation, the main aspect to be highlighted concerns the links between organised and informal civil society movements. However, even within the vast diversity of organised civil society, there is a diversity of realities, contexts, areas of work and even cultural perspectives, which are often a barrier to developing common ground or coordinated campaigning¹⁵⁰ or, when this is achieved, the diverse viewpoints can be discarded and made empty of valuable content to achieve consensus on shared values and discourses¹⁵¹. Several CSOs work at the grassroots, while other are active at state or national levels, which increases the differences in specific aims and types of activity. Nevertheless, when diversity is valued, its potential to promote a shared purpose through collaboration is huge, as it provides multiple resources to broader audiences, thus facilitating comprehensive understandings¹⁵².

If, on one side, the ‘power base’ provides credibility and legitimacy, on the other, the overarching network collaboration across Europe can ensure the power to act collectively and translate this diversity into access and action¹⁵³. This often happened during the pandemic with several joint papers and campaigns, especially in the areas of Associational Life and Social Economy (cfr. Sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.6).

Still, international networking is not easy to achieve for many local and regional CSOs, that often do not possess the necessary skills, tools and resources to actively participate in international cooperation and, thus, this specific question needs to be considered and tackled in the near future. For example, in the consultation developed under this study, several CSOs reported this lack of digital tools and skills in the Farmers area (cfr. Section 3.3.3). However, when umbrella CSOs that support these organisations

¹⁴⁸ OECD (2018), State of Fragility, OECD Publishing, available at: [OECD Highlights documents web.pdf](#).

¹⁴⁹ Intergenerational Foundation (2020), The Pandemic: Testing Intergenerational Solidarity, blogpost published on 1st Oct 2020, at: <https://www.if.org.uk/2020/10/01/pandemic-testing-intergenerational-solidarity/>.

¹⁵⁰ Wong, W. H. (2012). *Internal affairs: How the structure of NGOs transforms human rights*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

¹⁵¹ Jordan, L., & Van Tuijl, P. (2000). Political responsibility in transnational NGO advocacy. *World Development*, 28, 2051–2065

¹⁵² Magis, K. (2010). Convergence: Finding collective voice in global civil society. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 21, 317–338.

¹⁵³ Saz-Carranza, A., & Ospina, S. M. (2011). The behavioral dimension of governing interorganizational goal-directed networks—Managing the unity-diversity tension. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 21(2), 327–365.

were able to provide the necessary tools (e.g. COAG initiative cfr. Section 3.3.3.4), these proved to be extremely important to go beyond borders and increase the voices of CSOs. As referred in section 3.3.5.5, the consultation developed reported that the area of SMEs, Crafts and Family Business highlighted a high level of bureaucracy and several difficulties from SMEs to access funding support from governments and points out to the need to strengthen the connection between local, regional and national partners and therefore of promoting coordination and rapid consensus.

According to a recent EESC study “The work of organisations seems to have become more transnational. (...) This trend will continue in the future – as interviewees describe – also because they recognise that speaking in one voice is necessary in order to make an impact. Small organisations are worried about their future role at the European level, given that it is harder to be heard in times of social media and European representation, since there is so much competition of ideas. Since the European and national institutions mostly consult big associations, joining a European association themselves is the only way to bring in their interests and concerns”¹⁵⁴.

In this context, there are several layers of collaboration that are relevant, either to civil society organisations transversally, as also in specific sectors or areas of activity. At the ground level, there is a solid challenge for umbrella CSOs and international organisations, which is to **create and promote capacity-building programmes for grassroots CSOs**.

These programmes can tackle more basic knowledge such as language difficulties (e.g. providing training in English, on translation tools) or create forums of policy discussion with local organisations that can be further translated and crossed with conclusions from several countries. Also, periodic information on the European initiatives, new programs or regulations issued, as well as on the European agenda and priorities are also relevant to capacitate CSOs for transnational collaboration.

However, this will only be effective if governments and the European institutions provide the needed support:

1. Recommendation to the national governments: **reinforce the role of national networks, clusters, chambers and associations that support civil society**

As it was possible to conclude from the results highlighted in sections 3.3.4 and 3.3.5, strengthening the connection between local, regional and national partners and therefore promoting coordination and rapid consensus is an expected strategy for the future, that should be combined with the modernisation of CSOs, either through digitalisation, but also in what concerns innovation capabilities. For example, the questions raised by the respondents in the areas of liberal professionals and SMEs, such as the public discussion and ethical dilemmas related to the tele-provision of services were identified and thus, a reinforcement in the role of the national networks and organisations that support CSOs and can bring such issues to a broad and concerted discussion appears as a distinct need for the period (economic and societal) to come.

However, what is the feasibility of such cooperation for local organisations and what is its effectiveness? The different contexts, regulations and frameworks at the Member State level tend to increase CSOs difficulties to network and coordinate at the transnational level. This leads to the need of an international coordination and to highlight the role that EESC can play, as it is composed of Members coming from national organisations.

2. Recommendation to the European institutions: **promote focused benchmarking tools and guidelines to national organisations**.

¹⁵⁴ EESC (2020), Finding a new consensus on European civil society values and their evaluation, Study published on 25th June 2020, doi: 10.2864/73724. Available at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/publications-other-work/publications/finding-new-consensus-european-civil-society-values-and-their-evaluation-study>.

To provide some specific target areas, it is possible to refer structural policies to help CSOs to continue operations even under containment measures, that are being increasingly studied and adopted in some EU countries¹⁵⁵. These aim specially to promote the adoption of new working methods, as well as (digital) technologies and to find new markets and sales channels. If on one side they already address urgent needs such as teleworking, they also contribute to strengthening the resilience of these businesses in a structural way, thus favouring their growth and diminishing the potential negative impact of COVID-19. While having preferential channels to reach a broad diversity of relevant national organisations in all sectors, the EESC is recommended to regularly collect and share the most successful national initiatives in this sector, providing tools and guidelines to favour their benchmark in other countries, thus promoting transnational knowledge sharing and progress in successful implementation.

4.2.5 Relieve bureaucracy and administrative burdens

The economic support, both to citizens, as well as to organisations, were one of the central actions of European governments in order to balance the effects of the confinement measures¹⁵⁶. The rapid evolution of the pandemic and the general lack of preparation to deal with the emergency situation, was however exacerbated by the slow capacity of organisations and systems to react, due to complex and obsolete procedures. The constant change in the epidemiological situation in the different countries and, consequently, on the degree of confinement to be implemented often implied quick changes in rules, procedures and support lines.

The large number of cases handled, the complexity of administrative procedures in applying, receiving funding and reporting on it, as well as the bureaucracy and difficulties in communication with public authorities was reported by CSOs of all areas in the survey developed under this study as one of the major challenges during the first wave of confinement. The political choice on the rules or beneficiaries of the public funds for support was also identified as a problem in some of the countries, which leads to the need of proposing changes in the rules. Concerns on the administrative burden are also mentioned and have even been used as grounds to organize joint positions and advocacy measures.

When asked to indicate the governmental measures that would be most helpful to their organisation in order to cope with the COVID-19 crisis, the top three types of aid selected by the survey respondents were unemployment and social security aids, financial programmes (e.g., low interest credit line) and tax waivers or temporary tax breaks. The participants also informed about adequacy of the adopted measures stating that either there were no specific programmes for their type of organisation (38%) or the existing programmes were not relevant to them (24%). In those countries where COVID-19 related CSOs' assistance programmes were put in place, 15 out of 76 respondents (19,7%) found it was not easy to access information about them (see questions Q75, Q76 and Q77 in Annex 2). For all the above it may be concluded that there is a considerable room for improvements which might be enabled by the following recommendations:

1. Recommendation to the European institutions: **create an Advisory Task Force to agree on a simplified process for emergency funding to CSOs**

Although many difficulties were reported, during the Spring and Summer 2020 there were also very good examples worldwide of organisations that implemented expedited and simplified funding

¹⁵⁵ OECD (2020), Coronavirus (COVID-19): SME policy responses, Updated on 15 July 2020, available at: <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/coronavirus-covid-19-sme-policy-responses-04440101/>.

¹⁵⁶ European Commission (2020), Policy measures taken against the spread and impact of the coronavirus – 20 August 2020, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/coronavirus_policy_measures_20_august.pdf.

processes, as it is the case of the Global Fund¹⁵⁷ or the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)¹⁵⁸. In the EU, there is a good example in the French government, that adopted a fast-track expenditure authorization procedure, where a step in the spending authorization procedure has been removed to accelerate the release of funds. In the revised law, full amounts are automatically released for expenditure authorization and are equal to appropriations¹⁵⁹. The World Health Organisation refers other good practices such as simplified procurement processes, advance payments and ex-post and/or risk-based controls (e.g., focus controls on high costs such as large purchases or infrastructure upgrades that are more susceptible to fraud).

A task force grounded on EESC that could bring up the best practices collected nationally and that would work with the EC on the creation of a proposal on common European guidelines of a simplified process of financial support to CSOs would, on one hand, facilitate a broad transnational cooperation between the civil society organisations; eliminate a substantial amount of the challenges they faced during the first wave of the pandemic and reinsure their role and sustainability; and create a positive benchmark that could possibly be used by other areas of activity others than civil society.

2. Recommendation to national governments: **implement simplified and expedited processes at national level**

Once a simplified procedure is agreed at the EU level, it is recommended that all EU countries adopt it and put it in place rapidly. National networks and CSOs can be of great help in this process by promoting a quick spread of the procedures, providing EESC and the EC with an immediate report on challenges and good examples and supporting the grassroots organisations to easily access support and funding.

4.2.6 Engage CSOs in the design of climate- and environment-friendly recovery plans

The European Recovery Plans seek to address the immediate crisis, but also to lay the foundations for a more resilient and more sustainable Europe. In a recent opinion adopted by EESC last October¹⁶⁰, it is stressed that the post-COVID-19 recovery should follow sustainable principles and a correlation of efforts between the ERDF, Cohesion Funds and other European programmes will be pivotal in supporting it.

From the organized civil society perspective, many networks and organizations have raised the attention on the necessity to make substantial and effective links between post-recovery plans and climate and environmental priorities under the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals and the fairness and equality principles that the Agenda 2030 pledges for. In the same direction, independent institutions such as the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) have proposed to introduce an independent assessment of recovery plans to fuel democratic debate and have compiled lists of criteria recovery plans and any economic stimulus must comply with¹⁶¹.

The respondents to the survey referred that the pandemic brought several challenges and environmental issues, but also represents an opportunity for turning around from unsustainable consumption and production patterns.

¹⁵⁷ The Global Fund (2020), COVID-19 Response Mechanism, 8th June 2020, available at: https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/9757/covid19_response_mechanism_procedures_en.pdf.

¹⁵⁸ Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (2020), "Public Assistance Simplified Application", at: <https://www.fema.gov/fact-sheet/public-assistance-simplified-application>.

¹⁵⁹ WHO (2020), How to budget for COVID-19 response? A rapid scan of budgetary mechanisms in highly affected countries, 25th March 2020, available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/how-to-budget-for-covid-19-response>.

¹⁶⁰ EESC (2020), COVID-19: Amendments to the CPR, ERDF and Cohesion Fund, Opinion adopted on the 18th September 2020, ECO/525-EESC-2020, available at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/covid-19-amendments-cpr-erdf-and-cohesion-fund>.

¹⁶¹ Think Sustainable Europe (2020), Europe's recovery plans must pass five sustainability tests, commentary published on Euractiv, 23 April 2020, available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/opinion/europes-recovery-plans-must-pass-five-sustainability-tests/>.

Two main recommendations arise from the reflections made through the study:

1. Recommendations for national and regional governments: **Establish alliance with social economy and other civil society actors and equip them with the needed legal frameworks and resources to scale up their innovative climate- and environment-friendly solutions.**

At the time of the survey realization (October 2020), more than half of the respondents (41 out of 76) felt that CSOs were not sufficiently involved in the recovery and reconstruction phase. This recommendation has the main aim of highlighting a step further beyond consulting and listening to CSOs, but also to uptake their lessons by creating supportive environments and investing adequate resources in the scaling up of the many promising forms of social experimentations, business models built around the principles of solidarity, co-operation and responsibility and alternative ways of organising economic activities, which they are pioneering¹⁶² but still in a too small scale to be able to generate enduring impacts.

2. Recommendation for the European institutions: **Foster balanced approaches that address both *localization* and *coordination* principles as key pillar in the alignment of recovery plans to SDGs.**

Local and regional governments have been at the forefront of the global response to the pandemic and they were championing innovative policies addressing the different dimensions of the SDGs (e.g. poverty reduction, sustainable urban development, climate change, social inclusion, the social economy, culture, etc.) well before the pandemic started¹⁶³. Furthermore, local and regional governments have developed a wealth of initiatives in collaboration with CSOs operating at local and regional level demonstrating that multi-stakeholder cooperation is a fundamental vehicle for localized SDG implementation plans to be embraced by civil society at large and rooted in the diverse urban and rural contexts. Nevertheless, for SDG localization efforts to be effective there is a need for national coordination, mapping and costing analyses as well as for an institutionalized dialogue between levels of government so as to accelerate the identification of the adequate technical support and funding streams needed in each context and territory. Thus, the aforementioned balance is crucial to examine and strengthening synergies between local and national plans.

¹⁶² OECD (2020), Social economy and the COVID-19 crisis: current and future roles, 30 July 2020, available at: <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/social-economy-and-the-covid-19-crisis-current-and-future-roles-f904b89f/>.

¹⁶³ United Cities and Local Governments (2020), TOWARDS THE LOCALIZATION OF THE SDGs, How to accelerate transformative actions in the aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak, available at: https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/report_localization_hlpf_2020.pdf.

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- Association of Seniors of the European Public Service (SEPS/SFPE)
- Association PINS (Help for Integration, Employment, Socialization)
- Ateliers Without Borders Association (AFF)
- Austrian Chamber of Agriculture
- Austrian Chamber of Commerce
- Austrian Federal Chamber of Architects and Chartered Engineers
- Austrian Federal Conference of the Liberal Professions
- Bulgarian National Association Active Consumers
- Caritas Açores
- Caritas Algarve
- Caritas Coimbra
- Caritas Europa
- Caritas Viseu
- Centre for Autonomy
- Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners MTK
- Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry of Slovenia (CAFS)
- Chamber of Small and Medium Sized Industries of Thessaloniki
- Church of Sweden
- Citizen Forum
- Civil Society Europe (CSE)
- Community and Voluntary Pillar Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners in Finland
- Community of Sant'Egidio
- Confcooperative and CECOP-CICOPA Europe
- Confederation of Trade and Services in Portugal - CCP
- Confédération Paysanne Farmers' Union
- Consumers Protection Center Greece
- Consumers' Union of Finland
- Cyprus Employers & Industrialists Federation (OEB)
- Danish Consumer Council
- Austrian Federal Group of Christian Trade Unionists (FCG)
- Economic and Social Council of Greece (OKE)
- European Disability Forum (EDF)
- European Ageing Network (EAN)
- European Chronic Disease Alliance
- European Food Banks Federation (FEBA)

- European Kidney Health Alliance
- European Social Action Network (ESAN)
- European Youth of Canarias - Juveucan
- Federal Association of Liberal Professions Germany
- Federation of Swedish Farmers (LRF)
- Federation of the Hungarian Drugtherapeutic Institutes
- Finnish Federation for Social Affairs and Health (SOSTE)
- FISH - Italian Federation for Overcoming Disability
- Forum for Freedom in Education
- Foundation "Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza".
- French Confederation of Retirees (CFR)
- French-speaking Volunteering Platform
- German National Association of Senior Citizens' Organisations (BAGSO)
- Global Disability Movement (GDM)
- Greek National Commission of Human Rights (EEDA)
- Greek National Confederation of Disabled People (NCDP)
- Groene11 House Hospital Onlus
- Imkaan
- Inclusion Europe
- International Centre of Research and Information on the Public, Social and Cooperative Economy (CIRIEC)
- International Disability Alliance (IDA)
- Irish Peatlands Council
- Irish Rural Link Community Irish Farmers Association
- Italian Confederation of Intellectual Professions
- Italian Multiple Sclerosis Society Foundation (FISM)
- Junak - Czech Scouting
- Labor Consultant Studies Foundation
- Lions Club of Vila Nova de Poiares
- Lithuanian Association of Emotional Support Services
- Lithuanian Solar Energy Association
- Malta Federation of Organisations Persons with Disability (MFOPD)
- Malta Federation of Professional Associations
- Mediterranea Saving Humans
- Menedék - Hungarian Association for Migrants
- Ministry for Labour and Social Policy (Coordinator)
- Misericordia of Amadora
- Mutual Interprofessional Antilles Guyane (MIAG)
- National Association of Large Families in Hungary (NOE)
- National Confederation of Disabled People Greece
- National Cooperation Fund (NEA)
- National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)
- National Pensioners Association of Caixa Geral Depósitos (Portugal) (ANAC)
- National Youth Council of Slovenia
- Natuur & Milieu - Nature and Environment
- Netherlands Agricultural and Horticultural Association (LTO)
- Network of Estonian Non-profit Organizations

- Observatory on the Situation of Persons with Disabilities Misericordia of Albufeira
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- Romanian Association of Nature Lovers (ARIN)
- Slovak University of Technology
- Slovene Federation of Pensioners' Associations (ZDUS)
- Slovenian Global Action - SLOGA Platform
- Social Cooperative COOSS Marche
- Southern Great Plain Regional Society Research Association (DARTKE)
- Spanish Confederation of Families of Deaf People (FIAPAS)
- Spanish Confederation of Older People Organizations (CEOMA)
- Spanish Confederation of Social Economy Enterprises (CEPES)
- Spanish Coordinator of Farmers and Livestock Organizations (COAG)
- Spanish Federal Council of the European Movement
- Student Youth Council
- Tavira Red Cross
- TERRAS DENTRO - Association for the Integrated Development
- The Spanish Social Economy Employers' Confederation (CEPES)
- Tous Bénévoles - All Volunteers
- Tulip Foundation
- Turkey Association of Retired People
- Ukrainian Chamber of Tax Advisers
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- Volunteer Center Augsburg
- Volunteer Ireland
- Wise Age
- Women's Council Denmark
- Women's Budget Group
- Women's Room - Center for Sexual Rights
- Working Community of Associations of Social Organisations (WRZOS)
- Youth Work Ireland

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- *European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing (EIP on AHA)*
- *Reference Sites Collaborative Network (RSCN);*
- *AGE Platform Europe.*

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Annex 1 – Online survey

EESC SURVEY - The impact of COVID-19 on CSOs



**European Economic
and Social Committee**

Welcome to the European Economic and Social Committee study on “The response of civil society organisations to the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent restrictive measures adopted in Europe”.

There are 96 questions in this survey.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA PROTECTION

Before starting the survey, we would like to provide you with relevant information on the way your personal data and answers will be handled.

All entries in the survey will be treated in the strictest confidence and in line with EU legislation on data protection. The overall information gathered will be reported only in an aggregated and anonymised form, with the specific exclusion of the initiatives chosen to integrate the catalogue of good practices.

All data (including your personal data) will be removed after one year following the completion of the study in December 2020.

We ask for your email address. This will allow us to contact you in case we need to clarify doubts or gather additional information and to share the results with you. We will never use your email address for any other purpose than completing this study in line with EU data protection regulation.

For additional information, please read this document: [TO KEEP YOU WELL INFORMED ON CURRENT LEGISLATION](#)

To this purpose, we ask you please to select ONLY ONE option: *

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- I would like my name and organisation to be used as participant in this study and I understand it can be used in different reports and publications within the scope of this research.
- I do not allow my name and my organisations name to be used in any document.

[Qname]

Please insert your name: *

[Q01A]

Please insert your email: *

Please check the format of your answer.

INTRODUCTION

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has commissioned the present study to the companies Wise Angle SL and SHINE 2Europe LDA with the aim to analyse the consequences of the pandemic for CSOs, so as to highlight their role and the benefits of their actions for European societies.

In this context, the survey you have kindly accepted to fill out intends to collect information on the impact of COVID-19 on the work, the sustainability and the future of CSOs in Europe. The survey also aims to identify the response of CSOs to the new challenges brought by the pandemic, namely the actions they took to respond to societal needs arisen as a consequence of COVID-19 crisis.

The results of the survey will be used for recommendations and advocacy and will help the EESC to define the best strategy and measures necessary to support the CSOs for the coming period.

In the next section, you will find a detailed explanation of the survey's structure which we recommend you to read carefully.

Contact us

If you have questions concerning the study, please contact the study leaders Valentina Tageo - vtageo@wiseangle.es or Carina Dantas - carinadantas@shine2.eu.

For any technical questions, you can contact us by emailing luisdias@shine2.eu or acorsello@wiseangle.es.

SURVEY STRUCTURE AND INSTRUCTIONS TO PARTICIPATE

The survey has 4 sections, grouped in 2 phases.

Phase 1 has the purpose of MAPPING.

Section 1 intends to profile the CSOs that are participating in the survey and will thus ask for information that characterizes your organisation and its area of work.

Section 2 is focused on the new or adapted activities your CSO developed on the ground, namely those in three main areas:

- directed to target groups in need of support due to the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. shopping delivery, sanitary assistance, virtual social contacts with isolated persons).
- actions of information and support to members and target groups (e.g. help to farmers to find other ways of delivering their products or to professionals/SMEs to understand how they can get public financial support or continue operating).
- advocacy and awareness-raising measures towards public authorities.

If you fill in Section 2, you are eligible to pass on to the second phase of the survey and provide more detailed information regarding these new initiatives your CSO has implemented, their societal impact and the impact of the pandemic on your CSO.

Phase 2 intends to IDENTIFY and understand the impact of your activities. The deadline to complete sections 3 and 4 will be the 9th of October 2020.

Section 3 will ask you for more details concerning the new activities and initiatives that you implemented during the pandemic mapped in phase 1. Specifically, we will ask some details concerning their rationale, scope and their impacts on members and target groups, the human and material resources involved, costs, revenues, obstacles and accomplishments.

Section 4 intends to understand the impact of the pandemic in your CSO, mainly asking you for the challenges you had to cope with during this period and the ways the COVID-19 crisis and the consequent measures are likely to affect your role in the society.

If you believe you have this information already available, you can complete sections 3 and 4 within the same deadline of phase 1. If you need more time to collect it, you can finish sections 1 and 2 for now and we will ask you soon to fill in the remaining fields.

It will take around 15-30 minutes to fill out all sections of this survey.

Thank you for your collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has commissioned the present study to the companies Wise Angle SL and SHINE 2Europe LDA with the aim to analyse the consequences of the pandemic for CSOs, so as to highlight their role and the benefits of their actions for European societies.

In this context, the survey you have kindly accepted to fill out intends to collect information on the impact of COVID-19 on the work, the sustainability and the future of CSOs in Europe. The survey also aims to identify the response of CSOs to the new challenges brought by the pandemic, namely the actions they took to respond to societal needs arisen as a consequence of COVID-19 crisis.

The results of the survey will be used for recommendations and advocacy and will help the EESC to define the best strategy and measures necessary to support the CSOs for the coming period.

In the next section, you will find a detailed explanation of the survey's structure which we recommend you to read carefully.

Contact us

If you have questions concerning the study, please contact the study leaders Valentina Tageo - vtageo@wiseangle.es (<mailto:vtageo@wiseangle.es>) or Carina Dantas carinadantas@shine2.eu (<mailto:carinadantas@shine2.eu>).

For any technical questions, you can contact us by emailing luisdias@shine2.eu (<mailto:luisdias@shine2.eu>) or acorsello@wiseangle.es (<mailto:acorsello@wiseangle.es>).

Phase 1 - MAPPING

The Phase 1 of answers has the purpose of MAPPING. It includes sections 1 and 2 and has the deadline of 10th of September to be filled in and submitted.

Section 1 - Profile

The present section contains a set of questions to identify and profile the responder and the organisation.

[Q1]

What gender do you identify as? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- Male
- Female
- Other
- Prefer not to say

[Q2]

What is your level of studies? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- Some High School
- High School
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctorate
- Trade, Vocational or Professional Education
- Prefer not to say

[Q3]

What is your age group? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- 18-30
- 31-45
- 46-64
- +65
- Prefer not to say

[Q4]

What is the name of the CSO you are working at/supporting? *

Please write your answer here:

[Q5]

Are you an EESC Member? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

[Q5A]

Please specify to which EESC group you belong to: *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

If answer was 'Yes' at question [Q5]

Please choose only one of the following:

- Group III
- Group II
- Group I

[Q6]

What is your position in the CSO you are working at/supporting? *

Please write your answer here:

[Q7]

Which of the following areas do you consider your CSO belongs to? Before answering you might check the links to the EESC group classification and if none of them is applicable please select “Other” and detail: *

Choose one of the following answers

- Consumers and Environment (<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/members-groups/categories/consumers-and-environment-category-cec>)
- Farmers (<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/members-groups/categories/farmers-category>)
- Associational Life (<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/members-groups/categories/voluntary-sector-category>)
- Liberal Professions (<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/members-groups/categories/professions-category>)
- SMEs, Crafts and Family Business (<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/members-groups/categories/smes-crafts-and-family-business-category>)
- Social Economy (<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/members-groups/categories/social-economy-category>)
- Other

[Q8]

What is the geographical coverage of the CSO you are working at/supporting? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- European
- Local
- Regional
- National
- International

[Q9]

In which country is your organisation based? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Albania | <input type="radio"/> Liechtenstein |
| <input type="radio"/> Andorra | <input type="radio"/> Lithuania |
| <input type="radio"/> Armenia Austria | <input type="radio"/> Luxembourg |
| <input type="radio"/> Azerbaijan | <input type="radio"/> Malta |
| <input type="radio"/> Belarus | <input type="radio"/> Moldova |
| <input type="radio"/> Belgium | <input type="radio"/> Monaco |
| <input type="radio"/> Bosnia and Herzegovina | <input type="radio"/> Montenegro |
| <input type="radio"/> Bulgaria | <input type="radio"/> Netherlands |
| <input type="radio"/> Croatia | <input type="radio"/> North Macedonia (formerly Macedonia) |
| <input type="radio"/> Cyprus | <input type="radio"/> Norway |
| <input type="radio"/> Czechia | <input type="radio"/> Poland |
| <input type="radio"/> Denmark | <input type="radio"/> Portugal |
| <input type="radio"/> Estonia | <input type="radio"/> Romania |
| <input type="radio"/> Finland | <input type="radio"/> Russia |
| <input type="radio"/> France | <input type="radio"/> San Marino |
| <input type="radio"/> Georgia | <input type="radio"/> Serbia |
| <input type="radio"/> Germany | <input type="radio"/> Slovakia |
| <input type="radio"/> Greece | <input type="radio"/> Slovenia |
| <input type="radio"/> Hungary | <input type="radio"/> Spain |
| <input type="radio"/> Iceland | <input type="radio"/> Sweden |
| <input type="radio"/> Ireland | <input type="radio"/> Switzerland |
| <input type="radio"/> Italy | <input type="radio"/> Turkey |
| <input type="radio"/> Kazakhstan | <input type="radio"/> Ukraine |
| <input type="radio"/> Kosovo | <input type="radio"/> United Kingdom (UK) |
| <input type="radio"/> Latvia | <input type="radio"/> Vatican City (Holy See) |

[Q10]

In which countries does your organisation work? *

Please choose all that apply:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Albania | <input type="radio"/> Liechtenstein |
| <input type="radio"/> Andorra | <input type="radio"/> Lithuania |
| <input type="radio"/> Armenia Austria | <input type="radio"/> Luxembourg |
| <input type="radio"/> Azerbaijan | <input type="radio"/> Malta |
| <input type="radio"/> Belarus | <input type="radio"/> Moldova |
| <input type="radio"/> Belgium | <input type="radio"/> Monaco |
| <input type="radio"/> Bosnia and Herzegovina | <input type="radio"/> Montenegro |
| <input type="radio"/> Bulgaria | <input type="radio"/> Netherlands |
| <input type="radio"/> Croatia | <input type="radio"/> North Macedonia (formerly Macedonia) |
| <input type="radio"/> Cyprus | <input type="radio"/> Norway |
| <input type="radio"/> Czechia | <input type="radio"/> Poland |
| <input type="radio"/> Denmark | <input type="radio"/> Portugal |
| <input type="radio"/> Estonia | <input type="radio"/> Romania |
| <input type="radio"/> Finland | <input type="radio"/> Russia |
| <input type="radio"/> France | <input type="radio"/> San Marino |
| <input type="radio"/> Georgia | <input type="radio"/> Serbia |
| <input type="radio"/> Germany | <input type="radio"/> Slovakia |
| <input type="radio"/> Greece | <input type="radio"/> Slovenia |
| <input type="radio"/> Hungary | <input type="radio"/> Spain |
| <input type="radio"/> Iceland | <input type="radio"/> Sweden |
| <input type="radio"/> Ireland | <input type="radio"/> Switzerland |
| <input type="radio"/> Italy | <input type="radio"/> Turkey |
| <input type="radio"/> Kazakhstan | <input type="radio"/> Ukraine |
| <input type="radio"/> Kosovo | <input type="radio"/> United Kingdom (UK) |
| <input type="radio"/> Latvia | <input type="radio"/> Vatican City (Holy See) |

[Q11]

Here below you find a list of organisational and legal forms. Please tick the options that best define your organisation: *

Please choose all that apply:

- Association
- Community-Based organisation
- Cooperative
- Mutual society
- Foundation
- Network
- Independent research institution
- Independent media
- Professional Association
- Faith-based Organisation
- Social Enterprise
- Activist / Social Movement
- International Organization
- Other:

[Q12]

Which type/s of stakeholders and/or interests is/are represented among your members and target groups? *

Please choose all that apply:

- Citizens
- Citizenry (as a whole)
- Citizens through involvement in active citizenship and participatory democracy actions
- Consumers
- Patients
- Families
- People in vulnerable contexts
- Gender specific groups:
 - Women
 - Men
 - LGBT+
- Age specific groups:
 - Children
 - Youth
 - Older adults
- Social workers
- Farmers
- Artists
- Academic
- Members of Liberal Professions
- SMEs', crafts and family businesses' owners
- Volunteers
- Social economy enterprises
- Environmental safeguard activists
- Human rights protection activists
- Other

[Q13]

If you have ticked the “consumers” category in the previous question, please specify the kind of interest or relevant issue your CSO is working to protect or deal with: *

Please choose all that apply:

- Protecting consumers’ rights in cross-border trade
- Protecting consumers’ rights in online trade
- Protecting rights of food products’ consumers
- Fighting unfair and illegal trading practices
- Promoting sustainable consumption
- Safeguarding consumers’ safety
- Other:

[Q14]

If you have ticked the “People in vulnerable contexts” category in the previous question, please specify: *

Please choose all that apply:

- People at risk of poverty or social exclusion
- Victims of violence
- Minors from disadvantaged backgrounds, unaccompanied or under precautionary measures
- People with unstable housing conditions (e.g. the homeless)
- People with physical, mental and learning disabilities or poor mental health
- Long-term unemployed, inactive or in-work poor
- Prisoners
- People from ethnic or religious minorities (including refugees)
- Other:

[Q15]

How many paid workers does your organisation have (as of July 2020)? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- 0-15
- 16-30
- 31-50
- 51-100
- Over 100

[Q16]

How many volunteers does your organisation have (as of July 2020)? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- 0-15
- 16-30
- 31-50
- 51-100
- Over 100

[Q17]

What is your organization's current year budget? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- Under €100,000
- €100,000 - €200,000
- €200,000 - €300,000
- €300,000 - €500,000
- €500,000 - €1,000,000
- €1,000,000 - €2,000,000
- Over €2,000,000

Section 2 – Mapping of the initiatives put in place by CSOs

We will now ask you some questions regarding the new, strengthened or enhanced initiatives you implemented to respond to COVID-19 challenges.

[Q18]

What is/are the main challenge/s or new need/s faced by your members or target groups as a consequence of the pandemic? *

Please write your answer here:

[Q19]

Did your CSO implement new or adapted activities, services or initiatives to tackle COVID-19 challenges? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
 No

[Q20]

If you have answered Yes to the previous question, please specify how many new or adapted activities, services or initiatives your CSO implemented: *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question [Q19]

Only numbers may be entered in this field.

Please write your answer here:

[Q21]

Regarding the previous question, please specify the main purpose of the new activities, services or initiatives that your CSO implemented to tackle the COVID-19 challenges? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at [Q19]

Please choose all that apply:

- Initiatives directed to target groups in need of support due to the COVID-19 pandemic
e.g. shopping delivery, sanitary assistance, virtual social contacts with isolated persons.
- actions of information and support to members and target groups
e.g. help to farmers to find other ways of delivering their products or to professionals/SMEs to understand how they can get public financial support or continue operating.
- advocacy actions or/and awareness-raising measures, namely towards public authorities
e.g. prevention campaign to dispel misinformation about the coronavirus; awareness-raising initiative nearby the Government to ensure disadvantaged people or groups have proper access to healthcare.
- Other:

[Q22]

If you have answered yes to question 19, please indicate which strategy/strategies your CSO has adopted: *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question [Q19]

Please choose all that apply:

- Continued to offer existing services by adapting its service provision modalities and procedures to the new regulations or converting existing services by other means
- Strengthened existing services
- Converted existing services in online services
- Launched customized or new services for members and/or target groups
- Launched new services or initiatives for groups different than your traditional members and targets
- Other:

[Q23]

Please list the type of new activities, services, or initiatives you have implemented: *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question [Q19]

Please choose all that apply:

- Advocacy work, information and awareness (e.g. highlighting abuses, ensuring transparency)
- Health or social care services
- Online assistance to members or target groups
- Phone assistance to members or target groups
- Professional support (such as bureaucratic, legal or financial advisory services to members or target groups)
- Education and leisure
- Coordination (e.g. facilitating effective CSO involvement)
- Facilitation of connection among members
- Facilitation of mutual aid among members
- Emergency response (e.g. distributing food and hygiene products)
- Cultural or artistic initiatives
- Mobility solutions
- Policy and strategic advice, formulation and elaboration
- Training
- Legal assistance
- Research
- Other:

[Q24]

How many people did you impact with these new initiatives?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question [Q19]

Only numbers may be entered in this field.

Please write your answer here:

[Q25]

Which type/s of stakeholders benefited from the initiatives or were represented through them, amongst your members and target groups? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question [Q19]

Please choose all that apply:

- Citizens
- Citizenry (as a whole)
- Citizens through involvement in active citizenship and participatory democracy actions
- Consumers
- Patients
- Families
- People in vulnerable contexts
- Gender specific groups:
 - Women
 - Men
 - LGBT+
- Age specific groups:
 - Children
 - Youth
 - Older adults
- Social workers
- Farmers
- Artists
- Academic
- Members of Liberal Professions
- SMEs', crafts and family businesses' owners
- Volunteers
- Social economy enterprises
- Environmental safeguard activists
- Human rights protection activists
- Other:

[Q25A]

If you have ticked the “People in vulnerable contexts” category in the previous question, please specify: *

Please choose all that apply:

- People at risk of poverty or social exclusion
- Victims of violence
- Minors from disadvantaged backgrounds, unaccompanied or under precautionary measures
- People with unstable housing conditions (e.g. the homeless)
- People with physical, mental and learning disabilities or poor mental health
- Long-term unemployed, inactive or in-work poor
- Prisoners
- People from ethnic or religious minorities (including refugees)
- Other, please specify

[Q25B]

If you have ticked the “consumers” category in the previous question, please specify the kind of interest or relevant issue your CSO is working to protect or deal with: *

Please choose all that apply:

- Protecting consumers’ rights in cross-border trade
- Protecting consumers’ rights in online trade
- Protecting rights of food products’ consumers
- Fighting unfair and illegal trading practices
- Promoting sustainable consumption
- Safeguarding consumers’ safety
- Other:

[Q26]

Are these new activities in line with your mission? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question [Q19]

Please choose only one of the following:

- No
- Yes
- Partially
- Not applicable

[Q27]

Please provide a text description of ONE relevant new or adapted activity/service/initiative you developed to face the COVID-19 pandemic, in a way that it can be further disseminated as part of a catalogue of good practices, thus focusing on scope, objective, target groups, duration and impact. If available, provide links and sources for consultation. *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question [Q19]

Please write your answer here:

[Q28]

In your opinion, was the activity successful? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question [Q19]

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

[Q28A]

Regarding the previous question, please motivate concisely your answer: *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question [Q19]

Please write your answer here:

[Q29]

Did your organisation rely on any digital technology to put in place the novel service, initiative or activity you have illustrated in the previous question? If yes, please describe its functioning and innovativeness briefly: *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question [Q19]

Please write your answer here:

[Q30]

Please upload a picture that can be used publicly in relation to the new or adapted activity/service/initiative you described above.

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question [Q19]

Please upload at most one file

Kindly attach the aforementioned documents along with the survey

Phase 1 of the survey is complete. Thank you!

If you want to continue to Phase 2, just click on the button **Next**.

If you prefer to continue later, please click on the button **Resume Later** on the top-right of the screen and close the window.

You may then come back in the next days by using the link you previously received on the invitation email.

Otherwise, in a few days, **we will send you a reminder for Phase 2**.

Thank you for your participation!

Phase 2 - IDENTIFY

The Phase 2 intends to IDENTIFY and understand the impact of your activities. The deadline to complete sections 3 and 4 will be the 1st of October 2020.

Section 3 - In-depth exploration of the initiatives put in place by CSOs (including results and resources)

The respondents are invited to continue filling out the third and fourth sections of the survey only if they have ticked Yes in question number 19 of the previous section. The following questions intend to collect more in-depth (both qualitative and quantitative) information on the transformed, new or strengthened activities, services or initiatives that the CSOs have undertaken to cope with the pandemic containment measures.

Welcome to the second part of this survey. If you need to revise your answers, feel free to go back and then continue to section 3. (*previous button*)

RESULTS

Q31

In one sentence, the best accomplishment/outcome of the new activities, services or initiatives your CSO implemented was... *

Please write your answer here:

[Q32]

In one sentence, the major difficulties of the new activities, services or initiatives our CSO implemented was... *

Please write your answer here:

[Q33]

In your view, what were the main challenges that the organisation faced to implement this activity? *

Please write your answer here:

[Q34]

Are you monitoring/have you monitored the satisfaction of your members and/or the target groups addressed by the new or adapted services? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

[Q35]

If you have answered yes to the previous question, please explain briefly how you are carrying out the satisfaction analysis, the indicators and results obtained, and if possible indicate sources or links in the case the outcomes are available for consultation:

Please write your answer here:

[Q36]

Are you monitoring/have you monitored the impacts achieved through the new or adapted services, initiatives, or activities on the addressed members or target groups? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

[Q37]

If you have answered yes to the previous question, what indicators are you measuring/have you measured? *

Please choose all that apply:

- Number of members/target users that benefited from your services
- Number of requests for support from members/target users your organisation received
- Number of meals (or food support) distributed
- Number of financial aids provided
- Number of home visits performed
- Public aids or services obtained by members/target users thanks to CSOs' bureaucratic or legal assistance
- Number of concerted actions designed by your CSO, together with public authorities
- Rate of participation of your members or target users in consultations and participatory actions
- Number of visits to your website
- Number of accesses to your COVID-19 dedicated webpage
- Outreach of your organisation on social media (e.g. number of followers, posts, likes, etc.)
- Reduced economic pressure on members/target users through direct monetary or in-kind support
- Other:

[Q38]

If you have answered yes to the previous question, please explain briefly how you are carrying out the impact assessment and, if possible, detail the indicators – e.g. number of users of assistance service; number of users of the information service, etc. – and the results obtained. *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at [Q36]

Please write your answer here:

[Q39]

Please indicate sources or links in the case the outcomes are available for consultation:

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at [Q36]

Please write your answer here:

RESOURCES

HUMAN RESOURCES

[Q40]

Did you need to contract new human resources for these new or adapted measures?

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No
- We only used volunteer work and support

[Q41]

If you have answered yes to the previous question, please indicate:

Which staff category/professional profile/areas of expertise did you need to integrate? (free text)

Which volunteers' profiles / areas of expertise did you need to integrate? (free text)

How many new employees (remunerated persons with any type of contractual situation) did you integrate (add % growth if available)? (free text, numerical value 0-100)

How many new volunteers did you integrate (add % growth if available)? (free text, numerical value 0-100)

[Q42]

Did you need to dismiss or temporarily lay off human resources with these new or adapted activities?

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

[Q43]

If you have answered yes to the previous question, of which staff category/professional profile/areas of expertise?

Please write your answer here:

[Q44]

If you have answered yes to question 42, please indicate how many job places have been lost due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Only numbers may be entered in this field.

Please write your answer here:

FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND SOURCES

[Q45]

Did these new or adapted activities imply an increase of costs?

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

[Q46]

If you answered yes to the previous question, please indicate in which area/s the costs increased:

Please choose all that apply:

- Human resources
- Equipment
- Goods / raw materials
- Subcontracts or expert/consultancy services
- Rents, construction work or new infrastructures
- Indirect costs (e.g. electricity, water, phone or internet)
- Transports (e.g. transport services, car acquisition, increase in fuel expenses)
- Other:

[Q47]

If you have ticked one or more options in the previous question, can you estimate in what percentage the overall expenses afforded by your organisation in the first half of 2020 have increased compared to those incurred in the same period in 2019?

Only numbers may be entered in this field.

Your answer must be between 0 and 100

Please write your answer here:

[Q48]

Did these new or adapted activities imply a decrease of costs on any of these areas?

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

[Q49]

If you answered yes to the previous question, please indicate in which area/s the costs decreased:

Please choose all that apply:

- Human resources
- Equipment
- Goods / raw materials
- Subcontracts or expert/consultancy services
- Rents, construction work or new infrastructures
- Indirect costs (e.g. electricity, water, phone or internet)
- Transports (e.g. transport services, car acquisition, increase in fuel expenses)
- Other:

[Q50]

If you have ticked one or more options in the previous question, can you estimate in what percentage the overall expenses afforded by your organisation in the first half of 2020 have decreased compared to those incurred in the same period in 2019?

Only numbers may be entered in this field.

Your answer must be between 0 and 100

Please write your answer here

[Q51]

What is the estimated variation in your organisation's balance sheet for 2020, when compared to 2019? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- Our revenues and expenses will be similar to 2019
- We will have a higher income
- We will have a lower income or a loss

[Q52]

Please indicate from what sources do you fund (either monetary or in-kind) the new or adapted services, activities or initiatives? If possible, insert the corresponding share in the box besides the option you tick. *

Comment only when you choose an answer.

Please choose all that apply and provide a comment:

International foundations

National or local foundations

NGOs

Individual donors

Private sector

National government

Regional and local authorities

International funding programmes

EU funding programmes

National or sub-national programmes

Own funds

Other:

MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT

[Q53]

Did your organisation need to acquire specific materials to continue its ordinary activity or offer the newly settled services?

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

[Q54]

If you have answered yes to the previous question, could you specify which types of materials the organisation had to acquire?

Please choose all that apply:

- Sufficient stocks of cleaning and disinfecting supplies to accommodate more frequent cleaning and disinfection
- Sufficient supplies to keep handwashing sinks accessible and fully stocked (e.g. soap, paper towels, hand wash sign, and trash bins)
- Transparent shields or other physical barriers to separate staff and visitors where social distancing is not an option
- Signs posted on how to stop the spread of COVID-19 and promote everyday protective measures
- Increased supplies of single-service and single-use articles
- Hand sanitizers to supplement hand washing
- Face masks
- Gloves
- Eye protection equipment (such as face shield or goggles)
- Other:

[Q55]

Did your organisation need to acquire new equipment or adapt existing infrastructure to secure compliance with the prescription of the local regulatory/health authorities?

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

[Q56]

Regarding the previous question, please tick one or more options among the one proposed here:

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question [Q55]

Please choose all that apply:

- The facility has increased circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors if possible, and using fan
- The facility has taken measures (e.g. tape on floors/sidewalks, partitions, and signage on walls) to minimize face-to-face contact
- The facility has arranged chairs in communal seating areas by turning, draping (covering chair with tape or fabric so seats cannot be used), spacing, or removing chairs to maintain social distancing.
- Daily in-person or virtual health checks (e.g. symptoms and/or temperature screening) of employees and volunteers are conducted before they enter the work site
- Daily in-person or virtual health checks (e.g. symptoms and/or temperature screening) of users and visitors are conducted before they enter the organisation's facilities
- High touch self-service containers and items requiring frequent hand contact have been removed from use
- Air ventilation systems have been checked and cleaned
- Other:

[Q57]

Did the organisation acquire new ICT systems or platforms to keep members and/or users connected, communicate and provide them with assistance? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

[Q57A]

If you have answered yes to the previous question, please specify:

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question [Q57]

Please write your answer here:

[Q58]

Has the organisation taken specific actions to make the shift to telework possible? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

[Q59]

If you have answered yes to the previous question, please specify whether your organisation has equipped the workers who are in the possibility to telework with:

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question [Q58]

Please choose all that apply:

- Laptop
- Screen
- Headset
- Mouse and Keyboard
- Internet connection
- Access to cloud-based repository
- Access to office workstation via Virtual Private Network (VPN) or else
- Other:

Section 4 – Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the response measures adopted by governments on the CSOs and their roles

In order to carry out a comprehensive landscape analysis and release a set of recommendations for the future of CSOs, the fourth and last section of the survey is meant to collect your views on the impacts on CSOs and on their roles in the European society.

<p>[Q60] Please state how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the impact of COVID-19 on CSOs in your country. (Please rate all sentences) *</p> <p>Please choose the appropriate response for each item:</p>	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
CSOs are playing a critical role in the national response to COVID-19	■	■	■	■	■
Most CSOs were not prepared to cope with the disruption caused by COVID-19 on their operations	■	■	■	■	■
COVID-19 will result in greater public appreciation for the work of CSOs	■	■	■	■	■
The work conducted by CSOs in documenting structural inequalities and advocating for political changes is threatened by the power centralisation which is characterising many national responses	■	■	■	■	■
COVID-19 will have a devastating impact on the sustainability of many CSOs	■	■	■	■	■
CSOs will emerge stronger and more agile after the COVID-19 crisis	■	■	■	■	■
COVID-19 will force funders to rethink power dynamics and transform their engagement with CSOs in Europe	■	■	■	■	■
Governments failed to recognize and utilize local CSOs' skills, experience and networks in responding to COVID-19	■	■	■	■	■

CSOs are not sufficiently involved in the recovery and reconstruction phase	■	■	■	■	■
Challenges and opportunities of online technologies will lead to a shift from traditionally-organised CSOs to more informal activism (e.g. selfhelp groups, social solidarity networks)	■	■	■	■	■
CSOs' agenda will be narrower and mainly focused on reforms in policy areas (e.g. healthcare, social security, education, and digital transformation) at the expense of other relevant fields	■	■	■	■	■
Like minded CSOs will join forces and cooperate more at local, regional or national level	■	■	■	■	■
Like minded CSOs will join forces and cooperate more at European level	■	■	■	■	■

[Q61]

Are you concerned about the fact that the adoption use of emergency measures may limit or impede CSOs' work in the provision of essential services to members and/or target groups? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

[Q62]

If you have answered yes to the previous question, please argument briefly the reasons for your concerns: *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes ' at question [Q61]

Please write your answer here:

[Q63]

Many countries have adopted special legislations to authorise rapid actions pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the country/countries where your organization operates, are you concerned about their duration and effects on the capacity of CSOs to promote rights and democracy? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

[Q64]

Regarding the previous question, please argue briefly the reasons for your concerns:

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes ' at question [Q63]

Please write your answer here:

[Q65]

Did the pandemic and the eventual reorganisation of your activities imply a substantial change on your capacities to enable societal impact as CSO?

(Please rate all sentences) *

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Improved	Maintained	Decreased	Not applicable
Advocacy capacity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Capacity to activate and support mechanisms for participatory democracy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Capacity to reach underserved communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Capacity to give voice to underrepresented communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Awareness raising and empowerment capacity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information and documentation capacity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

[Q65A]

If you chose other, please specify what is the capacity you refer to. *

Please write your answer here:

[Q66]

Regarding the previous question, please motivate concisely your answers: *

Please write your answer here:

[Q67]

How have your operations been affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic? *

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Not affected
- Slightly affected
- Moderately affected
- Strongly affected

[Q68]

Has the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic affected your organisation in any of the following ways? *

Please choose **all** that apply:

- Temporary shutdown
- Employee absences due to sickness or childcare
- Users not paying
- Reduced logistics services
- Problems with infrastructure, e.g. internet or roads
- Increased administrative bottlenecks
- Loss of funding
- Increased costs
- Reduced face-to-face community interaction
- Supply chain broken
- Restricted movement of staff
- Reduction of staff
- Forced staff to “work from home”
- Reduced or cancelled operations
- Introduced new ways of conducting work
- Increased demand for services
- Minimal or none
- Other:

[Q69]

Have any of your staff members tested positive for COVID-19? *

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- No
- Yes
- Don't know

[Q70]

If you answered yes, how many have tested positive?

Only numbers may be entered in this field.

Please write your answer here:

[Q71]

Have you adopted any of the following strategies to cope with the crisis? *

Please choose **all** that apply:

- Reduced groundwork activities
- Temporarily reduced employment
- Temporarily closed some services
- Laid off employees
- Loaned employees to other organisations
- Adopted teleworking
- Rescheduled bank loans
- Applied for governmental financial aids
- Applied for in kind aids or technical assistance programmes
- Increased communication and advertising efforts
- Filed for bankruptcy
- None
- Other:

[Q72]

Do you think there is a risk that your organisation will permanently shut down because of this crisis? *

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Yes
- No

[Q73]

Regarding the previous question, can you estimate when this closure could occur? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question [Q69]

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- 1 month or less
- 3 months
- 6 months or more

[Q74]

If the pandemic threatens the existence of your organization, what are the main threats? *

Please choose **all** that apply:

- Temporary shutdown
- Employee absences due to sickness or childcare
- Users not paying
- Reduced logistics services
- Problems with infrastructure, e.g. internet or roads
- Increased administrative bottlenecks
- Loss of funding
- Increased costs
- Reduced face-to-face community interaction
- Supply chain broken
- Restricted movement of staff
- Reduction of staff
- Forced staff to “work from home”
- Reduced or cancelled operations
- Minimal or none
- Other:

[Q75]

Please select the top three government measures that would be most helpful to your organisation, in order to cope with the COVID-19 crisis. *

Please select at most 3 answers

Please choose **all** that apply:

- Employment programmes (e.g. temporary unemployment programmes or social security waivers)
- Financial programmes, such as low interest credit line or credit guarantees
- Tax waivers or temporary tax breaks
- Reduction of tariffs on imported products and services or goods
- Rent subsidies
- Cash transfers
- Support to self-employed
- Other:

[Q76]

How adequate and relevant were, in your opinion, the government COVID-19 assistance programmes for your organisation? *

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- The assistance programmes were very adequate for our needs
- The assistance programmes were adequate for our needs but could be improved
- The existing programmes were not relevant for our organisation
- There were no specific programmes for our type of organisation

[Q77]

How easy was to access information and benefits from these COVID-related CSOs' assistance programmes? *

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Very easy
- Easy
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Difficult
- Very difficult

[Q78]

Thinking in the upcoming months, what type of support does your organisation need to work in the new and changing environment? *

Please choose **all** that apply:

- Secure the fulfilment of the basic needs to work remotely such as good internet connection and equipment or a space where staff can work
- Provide emotional and other mental health support to staff
- Adopt clear policies and procedures to guide the transition to remote work
- Adopt measures to support face-to-face/ground work during epidemics and pandemics whereas remote work is not doable
- Financial support
- No challenges experienced
- Other:

[Q79]

What type of (new) skills does your organisation need to work in the new and changing environment? *

Please choose **all** that apply:

- Skills to work remotely and switch to working remotely in terms of team management and project management
- Skills to work remotely in terms of service delivery and outreach work
- Online skills to communicate with for example with the government or the public
- Skills for online campaigning
- Skills for online fundraising
- Online relationship building
- Privacy and security awareness online
- Other:

Please, click on submit.



European Economic and Social Committee

Thank you for completing the survey. We will be pleased to share the results with you later this year. Thank you for your collaboration!

We will be pleased to share the results with you later this year. for any queries, please contact the study leaders Valentina Tageo - vtageo@wiseangle.es or Carina Dantas - carinadantas@shine2.eu.

Annex 2 – Quantitative results from the online survey

The following figures reports the results from the multiple-choice questions of the online survey which allow for graphic visualization of quantitative results.

[Q1] What gender do you identify as?
[Q3] What is your age group?

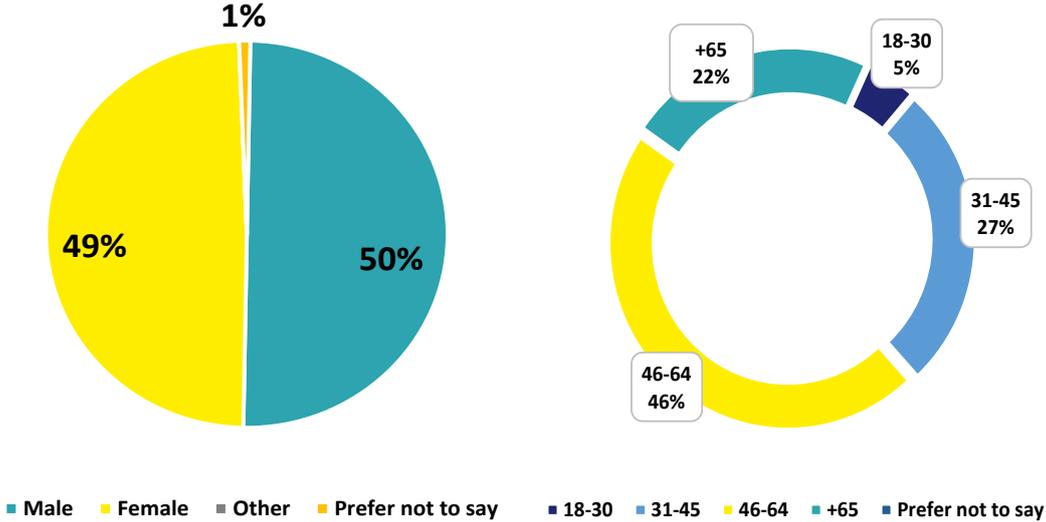


Figure 11. Gender and age groups of the respondents

[Q2] What is your level of studies?

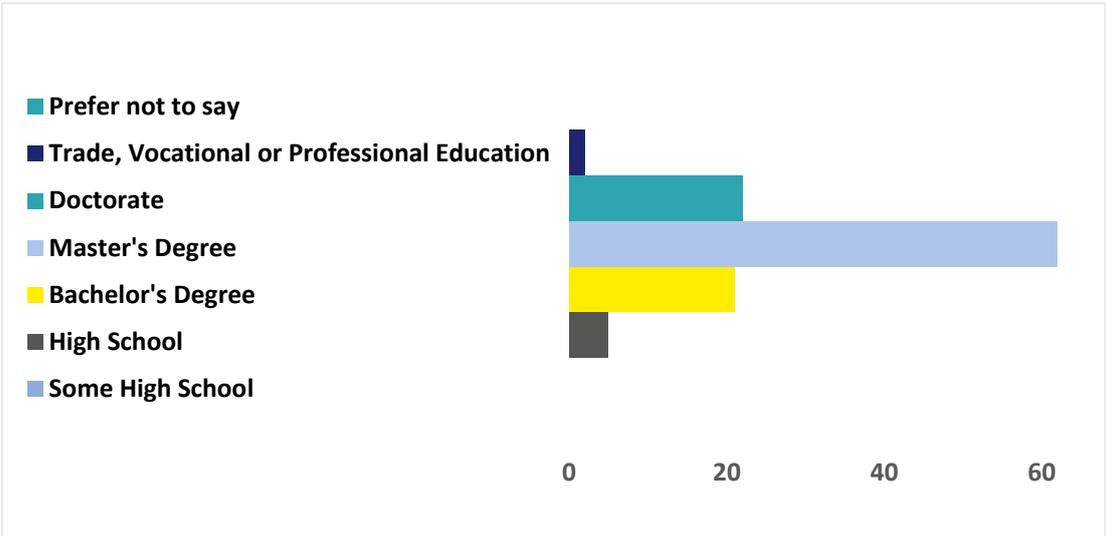


Figure 12. Educational background of the respondents

[Q5] Are you an EESC Member?

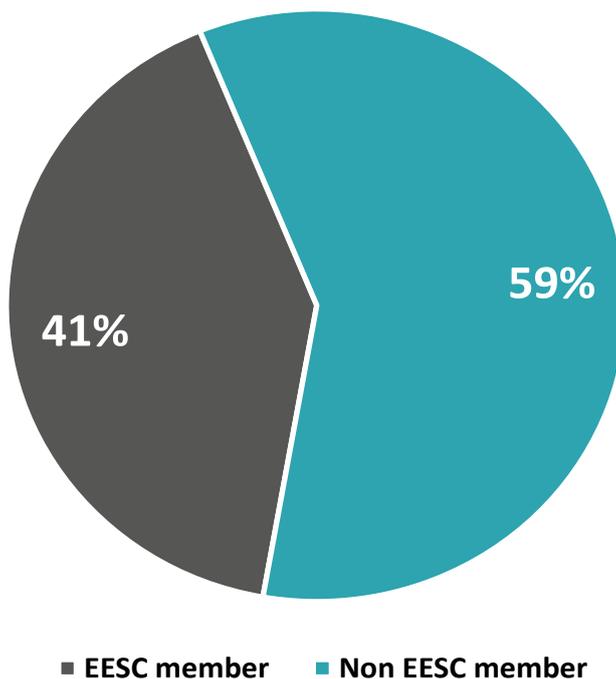


Figure 13. Distribution of the respondents between EESC members and non EESC members

[Q5A] Please specify to which EESC group you belong to.

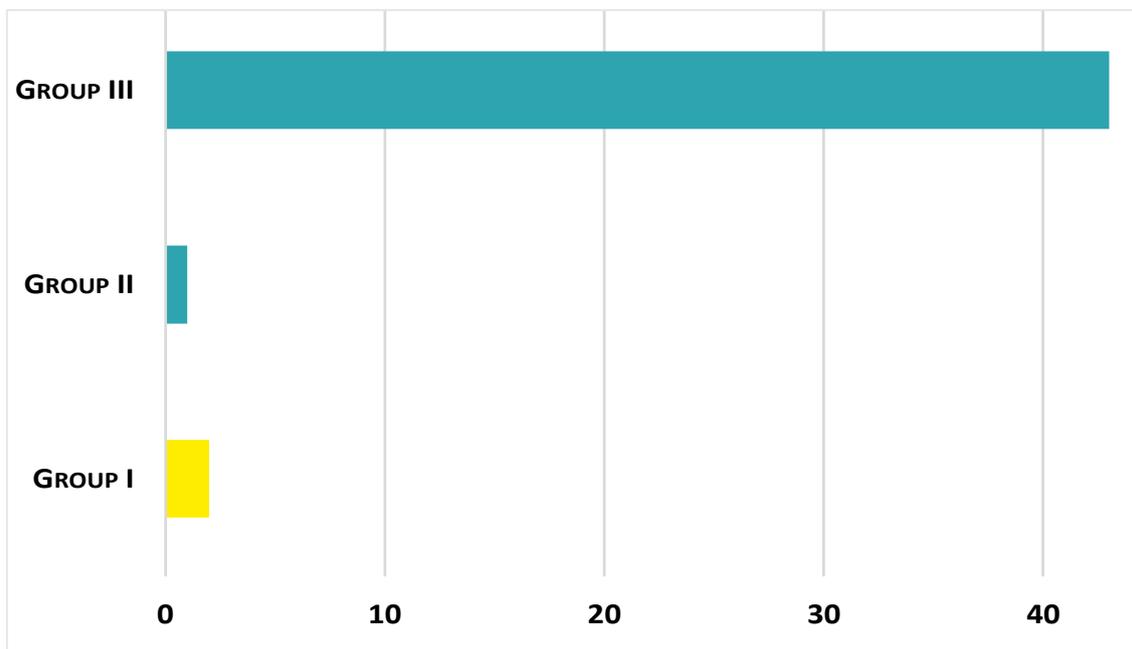


Figure 14. Distribution of the EESC members who answered the survey among the three EESC Groups

[Q7] Which of the following areas do you consider your CSO belongs to?

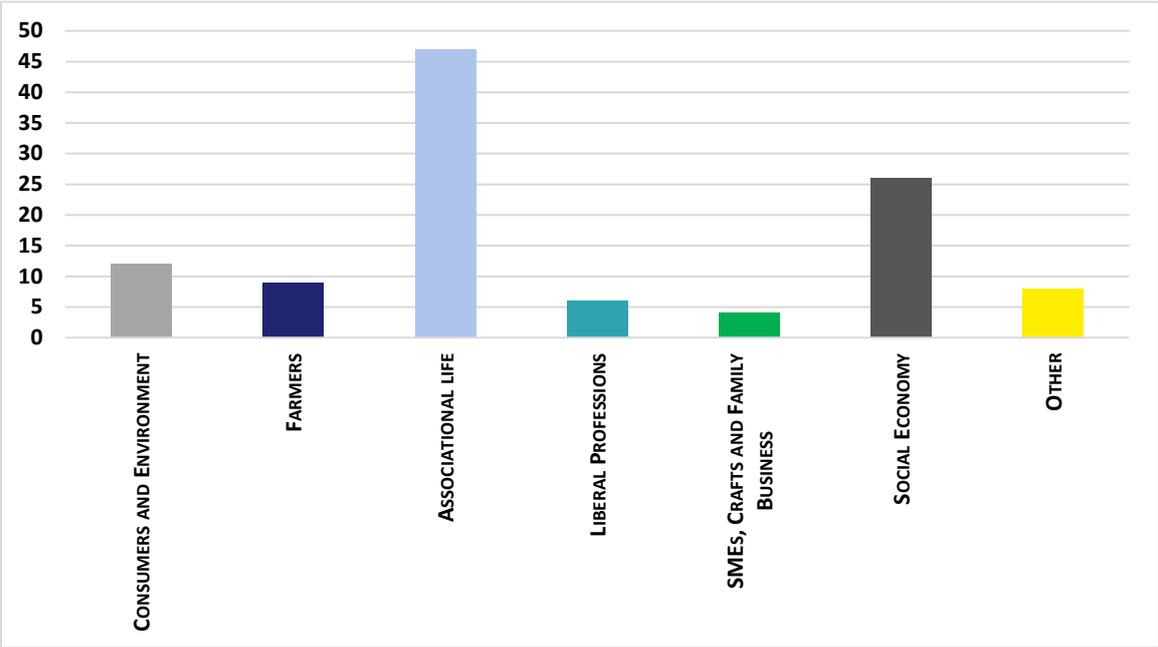


Figure 15. Pertaining CSOs areas of the respondents

[Q8] What is the geographical coverage of the CSO you are working at/supporting?

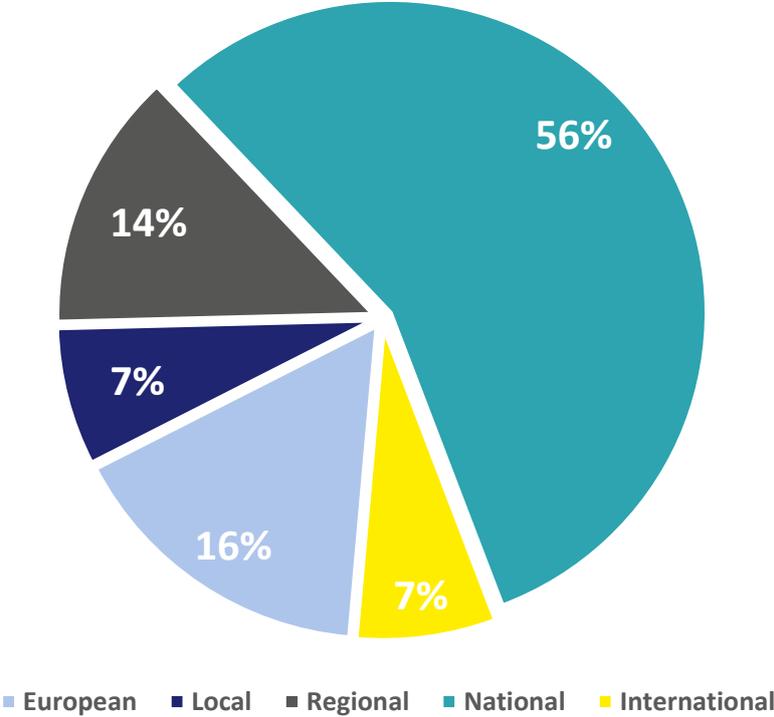


Figure 16. Geographical coverage of the CSOs participating in the survey

[Q9] In which country is your organisation based?

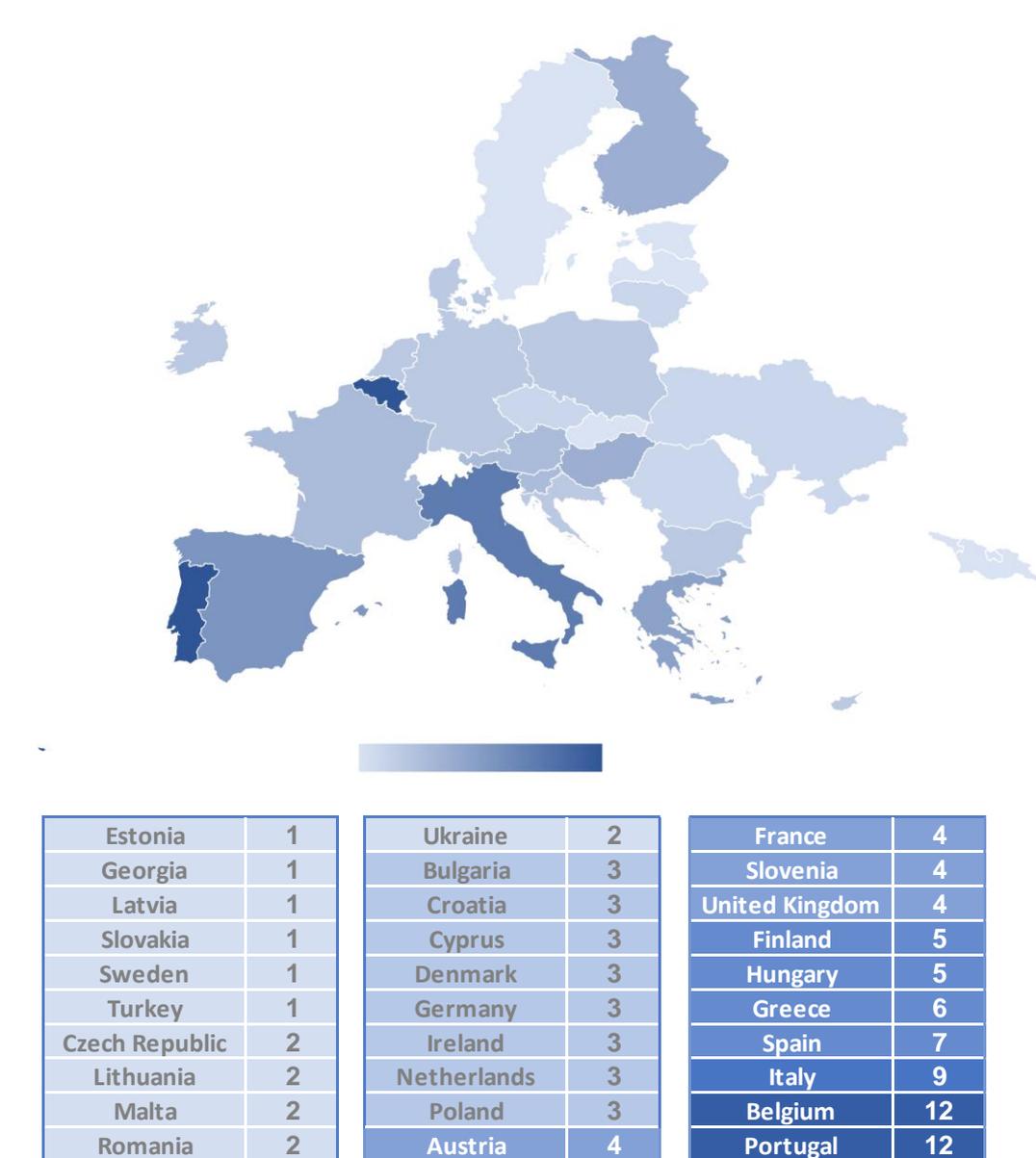
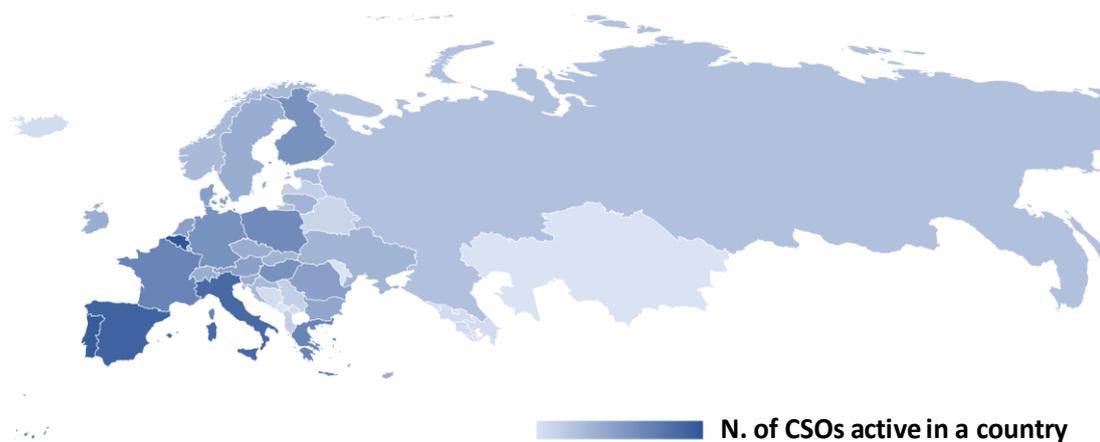


Figure 17. Geographical distribution of the CSOs participating in the study

[Q10] In which countries does your organisation work?



Kazakhstan	2
Liechtenstein	2
Moldova	2
Montenegro	2
Andorra	3
Armenia	3
Azerbaijan	3
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3
Georgia	3
Iceland	3
Kosovo	3
Monaco	3
San Marino	3
Vatican City (Holy See)	3
Belarus	4
North Macedonia (formerly Macedonia)	4
Albania	5
Latvia	5
Serbia	5
Turkey	6
Russia	7
Croatia	8
Estonia	8
Luxembourg	8
Norway	8
Lithuania	9
Slovakia	9
Ukraine	9
Cyprus	10
Czech Republic	10
Ireland	10
Malta	10
Slovenia	10
Sweden	10
Switzerland	10
Bulgaria	11
Austria	12
Romania	12
Denmark	12
Netherlands	12
Finland	14
Hungary	14
Germany	14
United Kingdom (UK)	14
Poland	15
Greece	16
France	16
Spain	21
Italy	20
Portugal	22
Belgium	23

Figure 19. Countries where the CSOs that have stated that they promoted new or adapted initiatives are based

[Q11] Here below you find a list of organisational and legal forms. Please tick the options that best define your organisation:

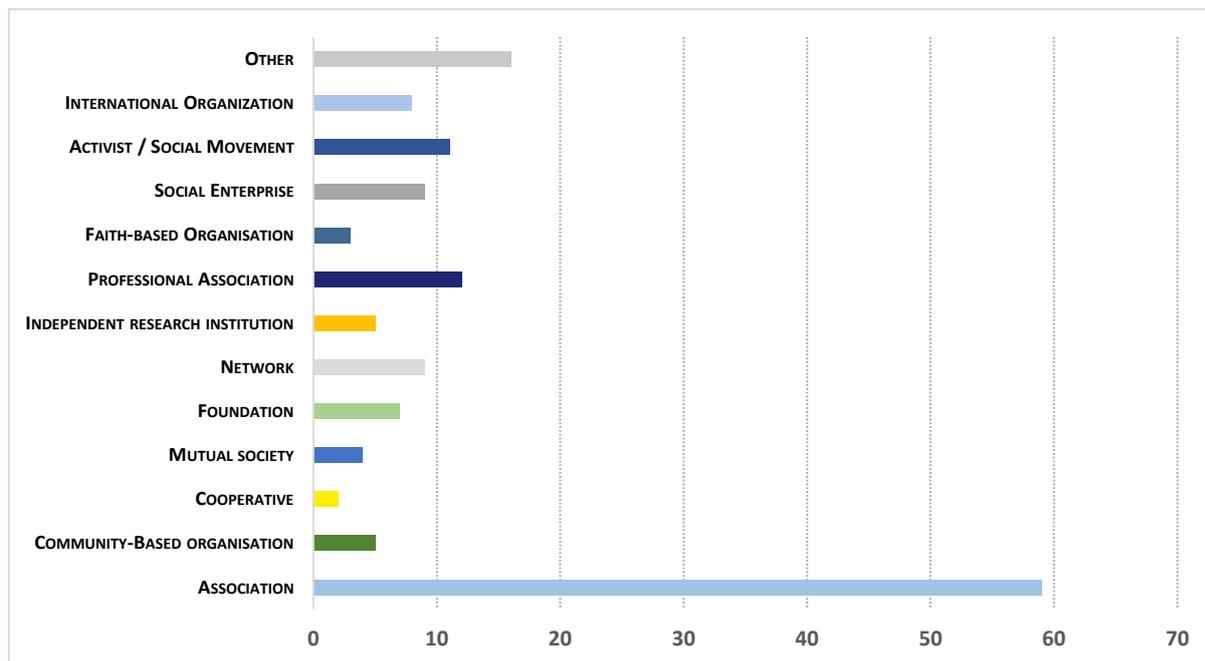


Figure 20. Organisational and legal form of the CSOs involved in the survey

[Q12] Which type/s of stakeholders and/or interests is/are represented among your members and target groups?

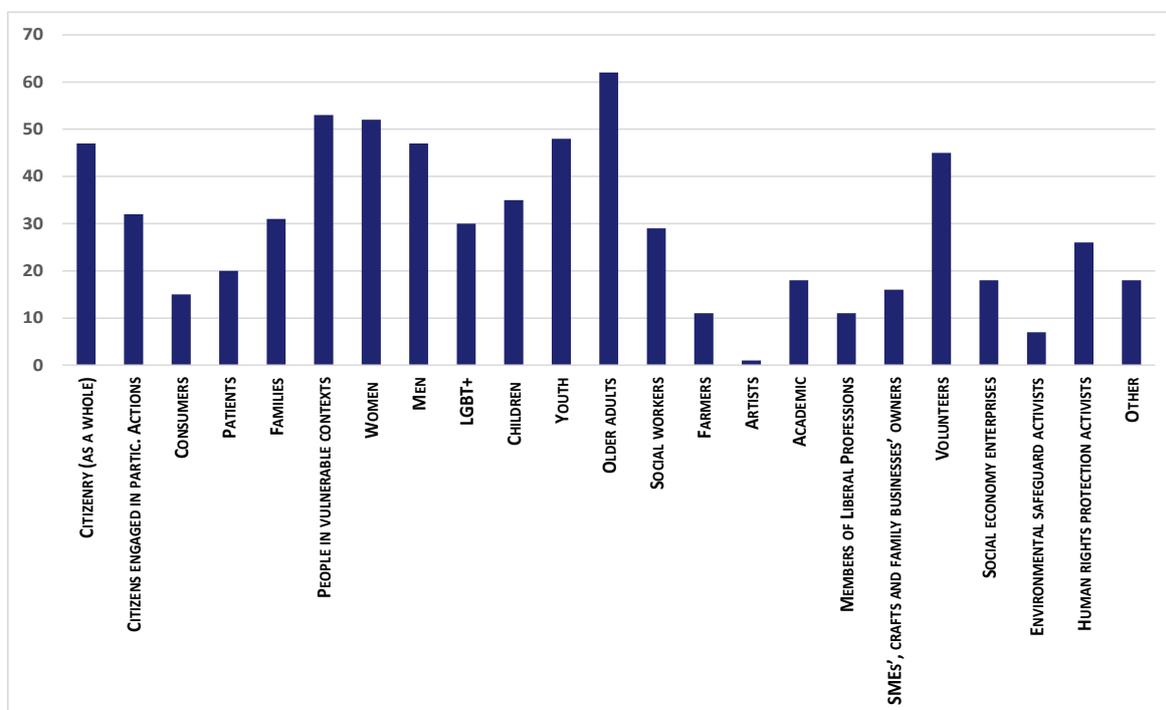


Figure 21. Type of stakeholders targeted as members or uses of the CSOs' services (number of CSOs that have ticked each stakeholder category)

[Q13] If you have ticked the “consumers” category in the previous question, please specify the kind of interest or relevant issue your CSO is working to protect or deal with.

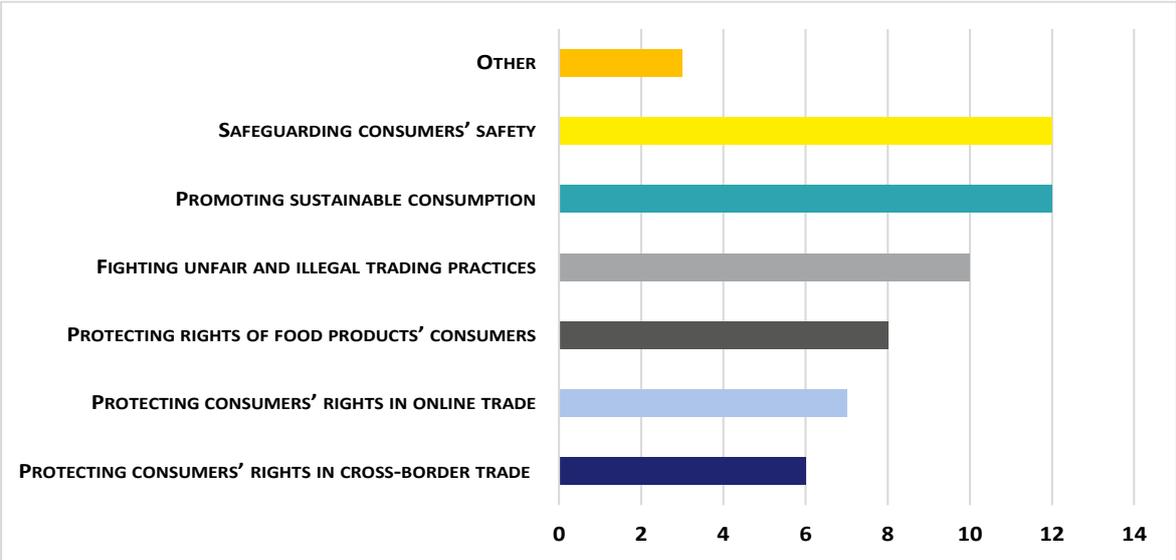


Figure 22. Type of interest or issue related to consumers the CSOs stated to mainly deal with

[Q14] If you have ticked the “People in vulnerable contexts” category in the previous question, please specify.

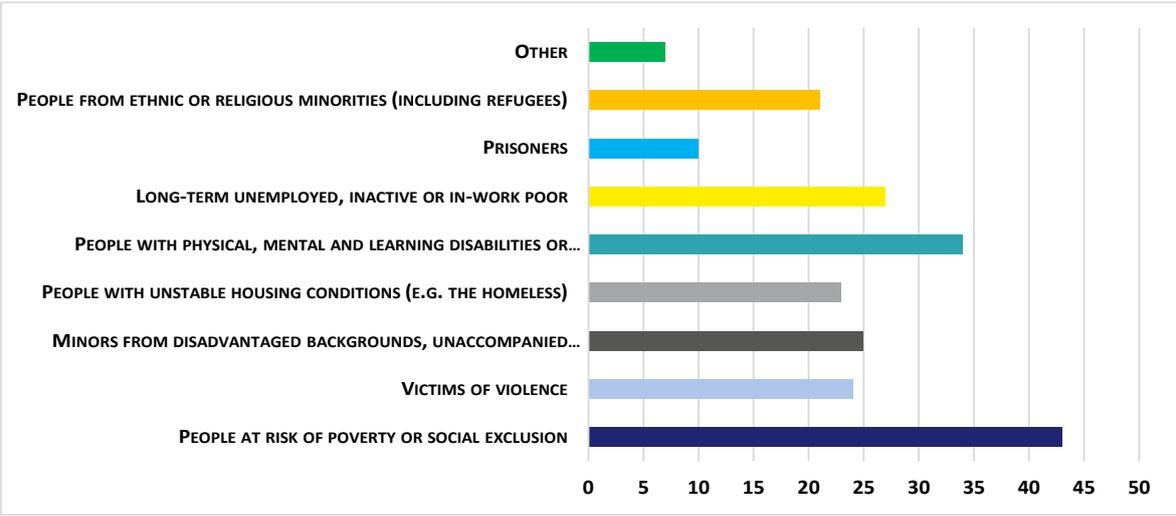


Figure 23. Main categories of vulnerable people concerned by CSOs' actions

[Q15] How many paid workers does your organisation have (as of July 2020)?

[Q16] How many volunteers does your organisation have (as of July 2020)?

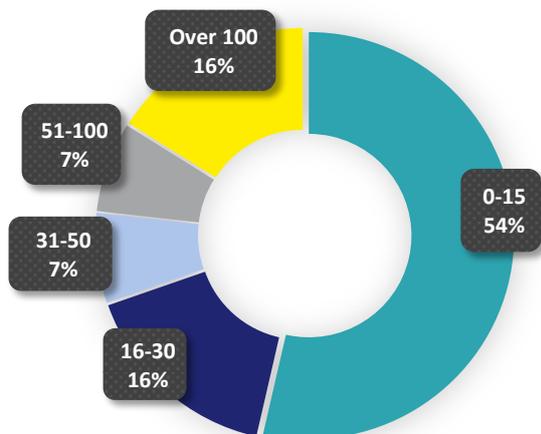


Figure 24. Number of volunteers working for the CSOs as of July 2020

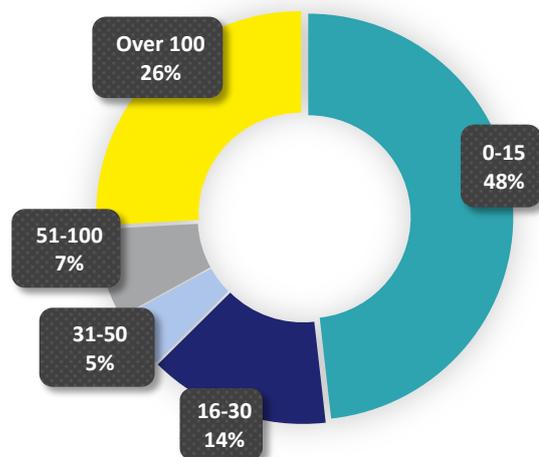


Figure 25. Number of paid workers by the CSOs as of July 2020

[Q17] What is your organization's current year budget?

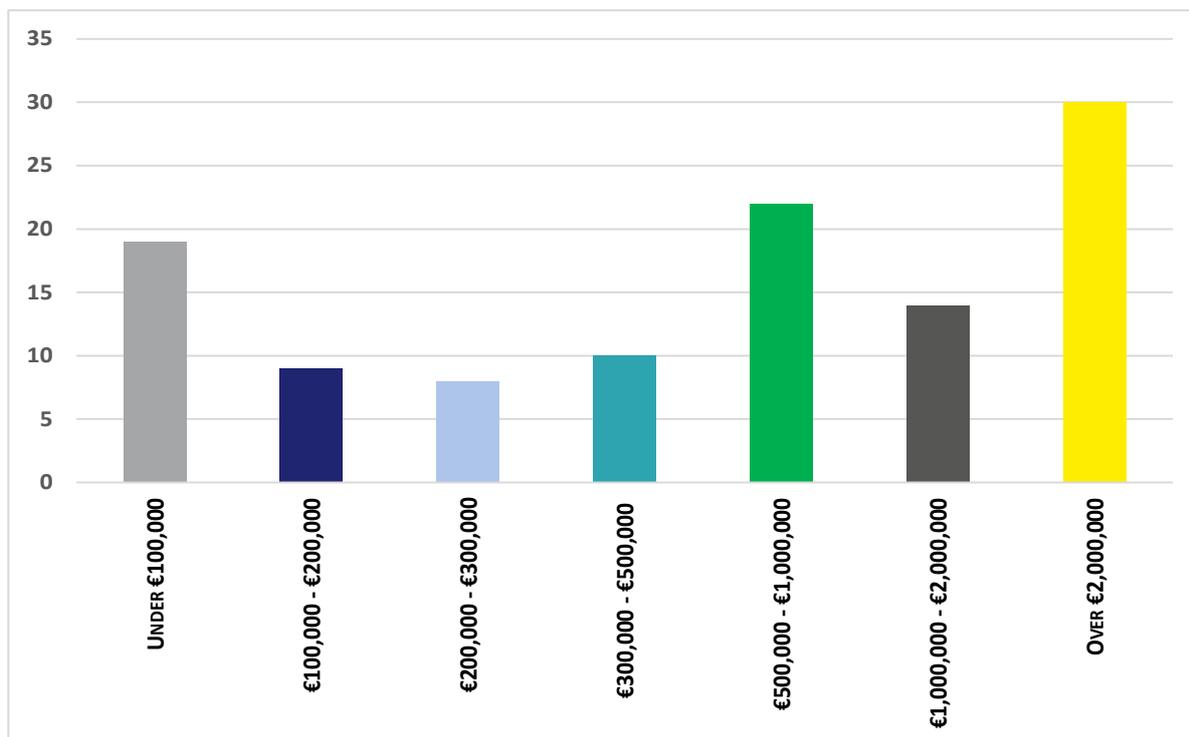


Figure 26. Current year organizations' budget

[Q19] Did your CSO implement new or adapted activities, services or initiatives to tackle COVID-19 challenges?

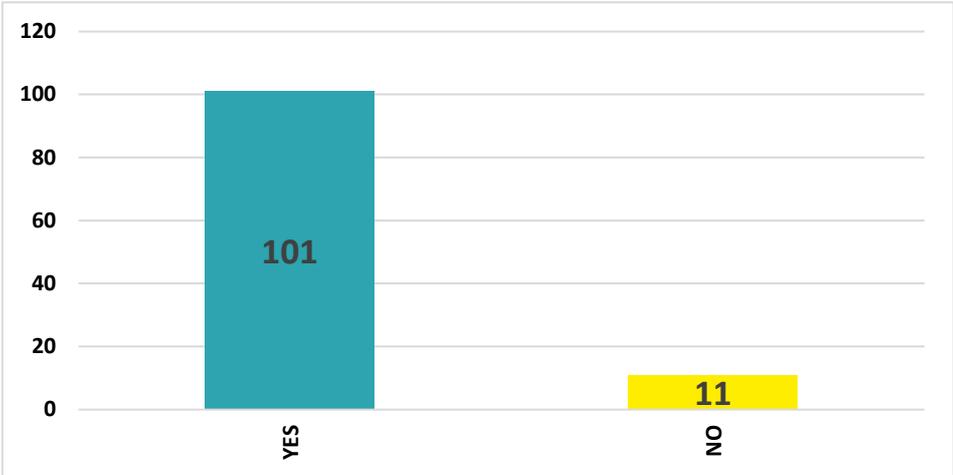


Figure 27. Number of CSOs that declared they have/have not implemented new or adapted activities, services or initiatives to tackle COVID-19 challenges

[Q19 bis] Split by EESC categories

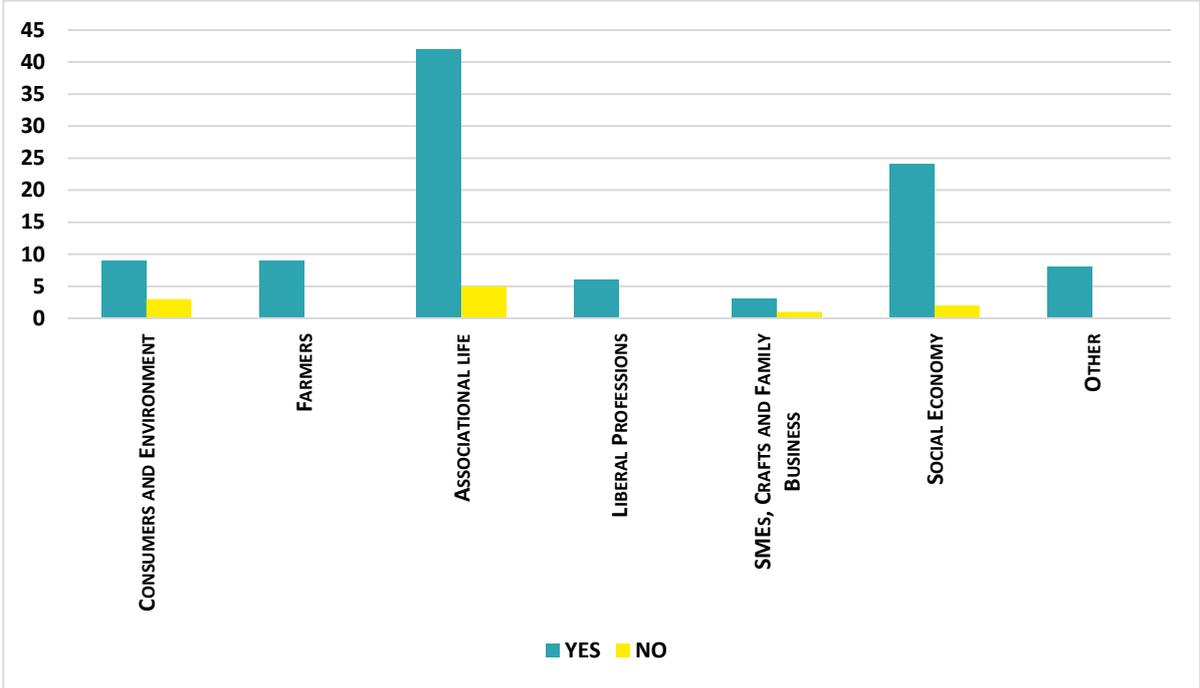


Figure 28. Distribution of respondents across EESC areas

[Q21] Regarding the previous question, please specify the main purpose of the new activities, services or initiatives that your CSO implemented to tackle the COVID-19 challenges?

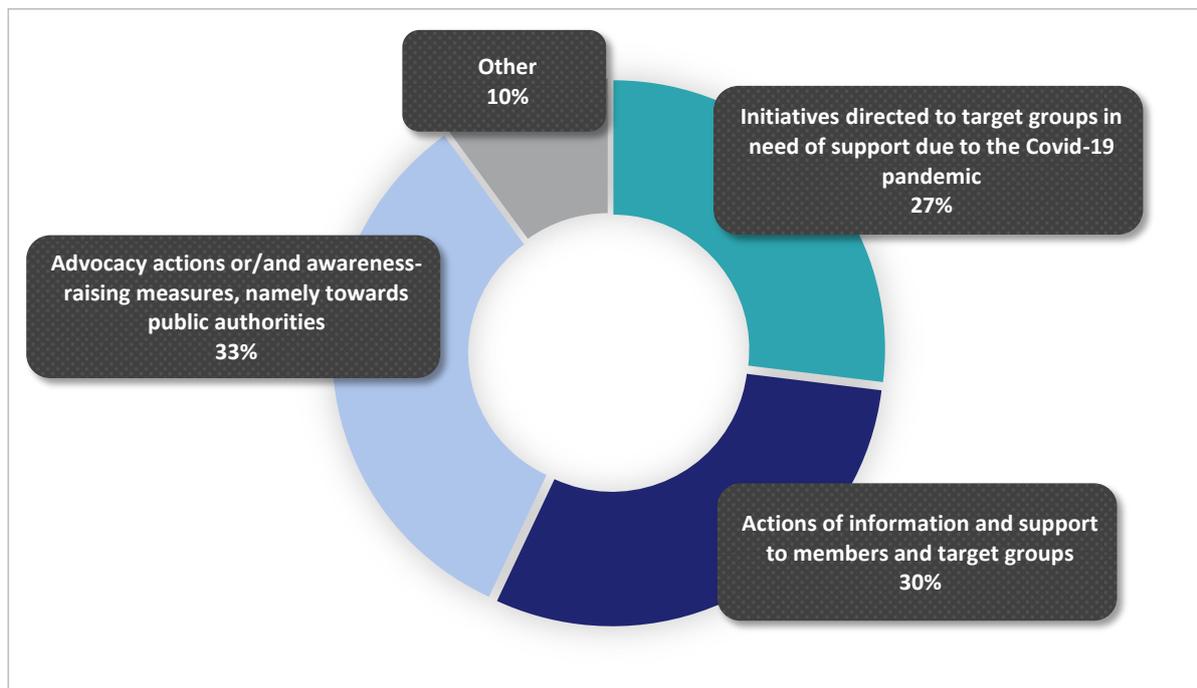


Figure 29. Main purpose of the new activities, services or initiatives that the CSOs implemented

[Q21 bis] Main purpose of the new activities, services or initiatives split by EESC category

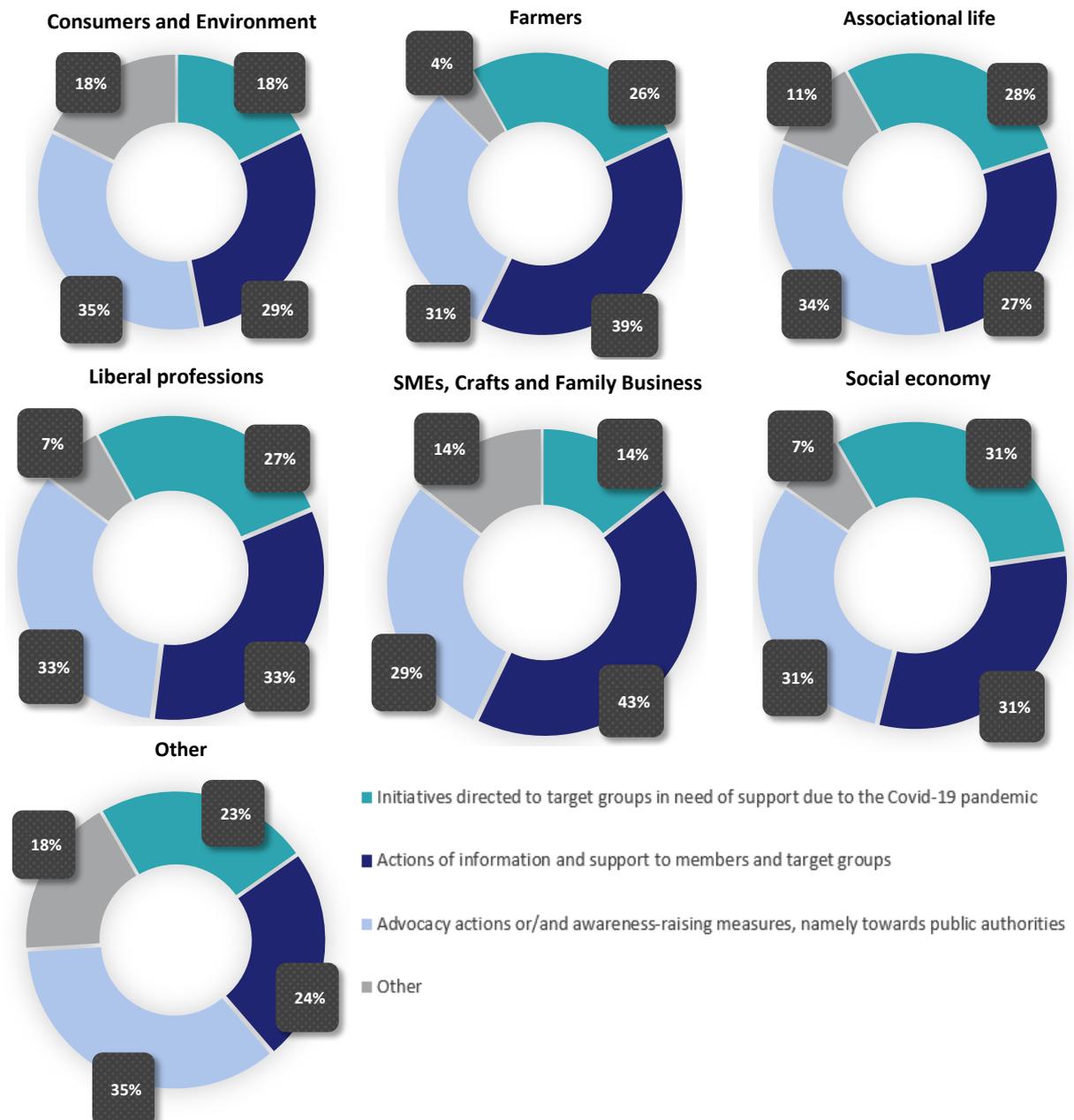


Figure 30. Main purpose of the new activities, services or initiatives that your CSO implemented to tackle the COVID-19 challenges - A graph for each CSOs' areas of interest

[Q22] If you have answered yes to question 19, please indicate which strategy/strategies your CSO has adopted.

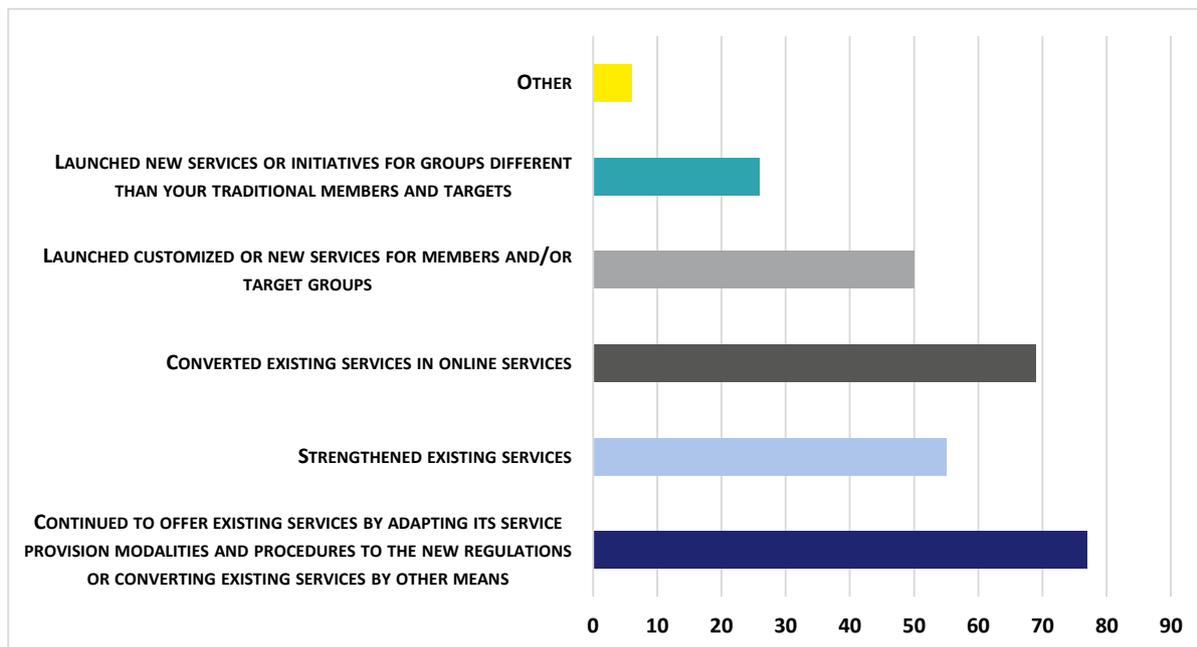


Figure 31. New strategies adopted by the CSOs

[Q22 bis] Split by categories

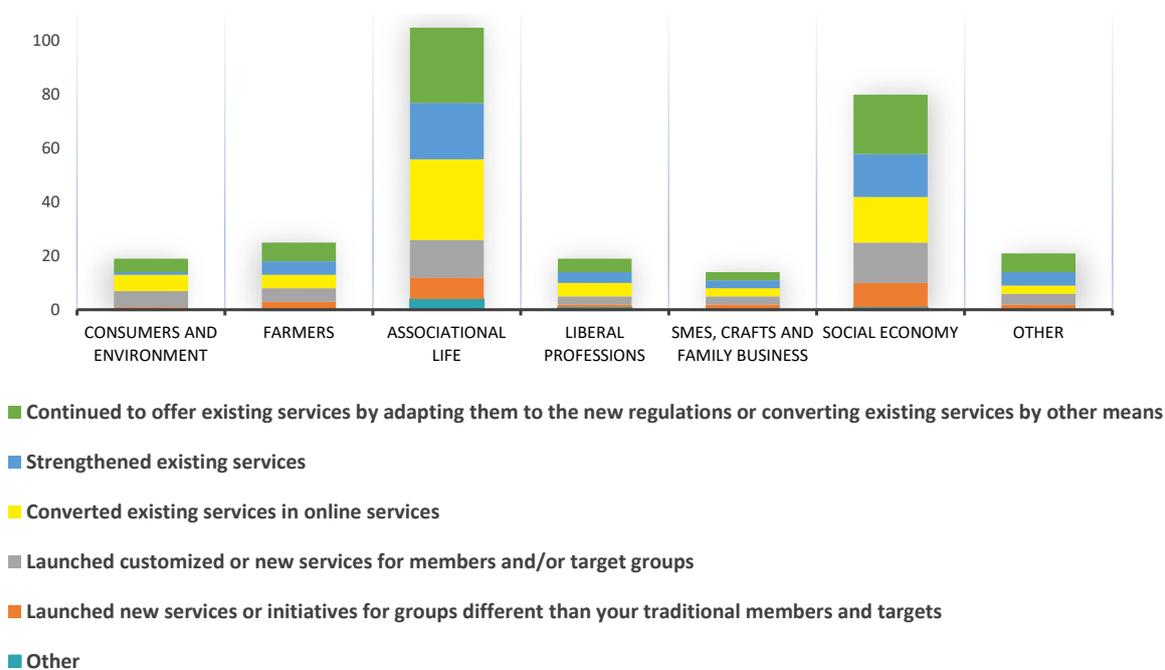


Figure 32. New strategies adopted by the CSOs in each EESC category

[Q23] Please list the type of new activities, services, or initiatives you have implemented.

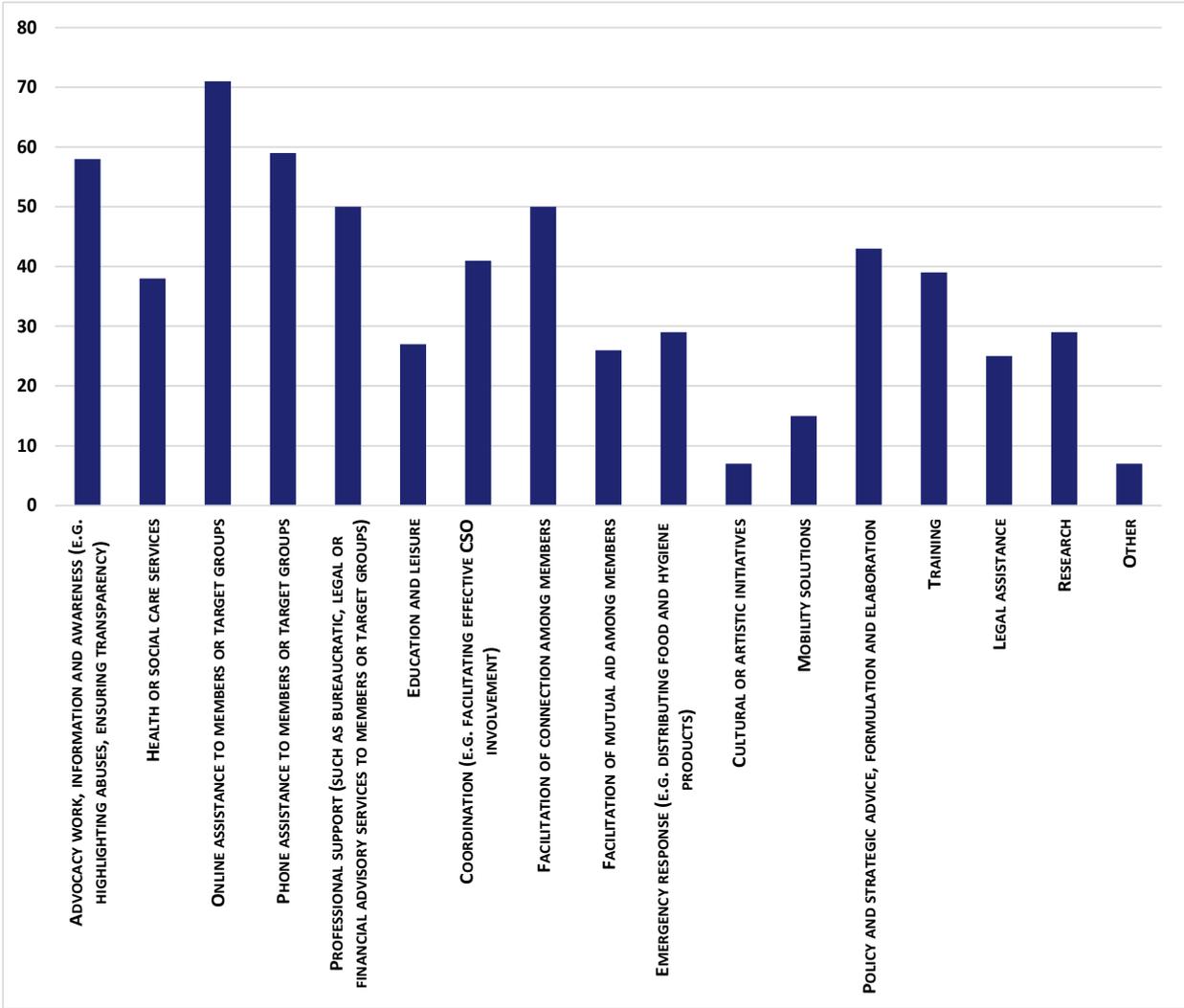


Figure 33. New activities, services or initiatives implemented by the CSOs

[Q24] How many people did you impact with these new initiatives?

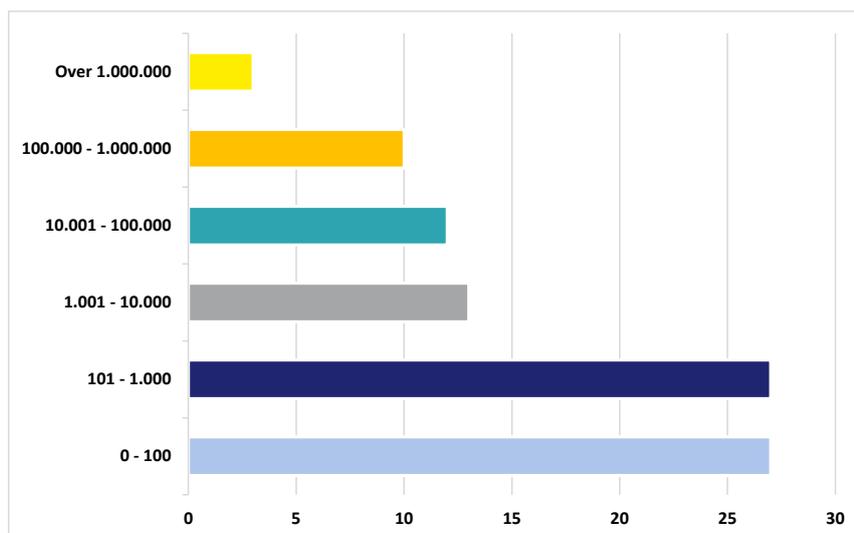


Figure 34. Answers to the (not compulsory) question "How many people did you impact with these new initiatives?"

[Q25] Which type/s of stakeholders benefited from the initiatives or were represented through them, amongst your members and target groups?

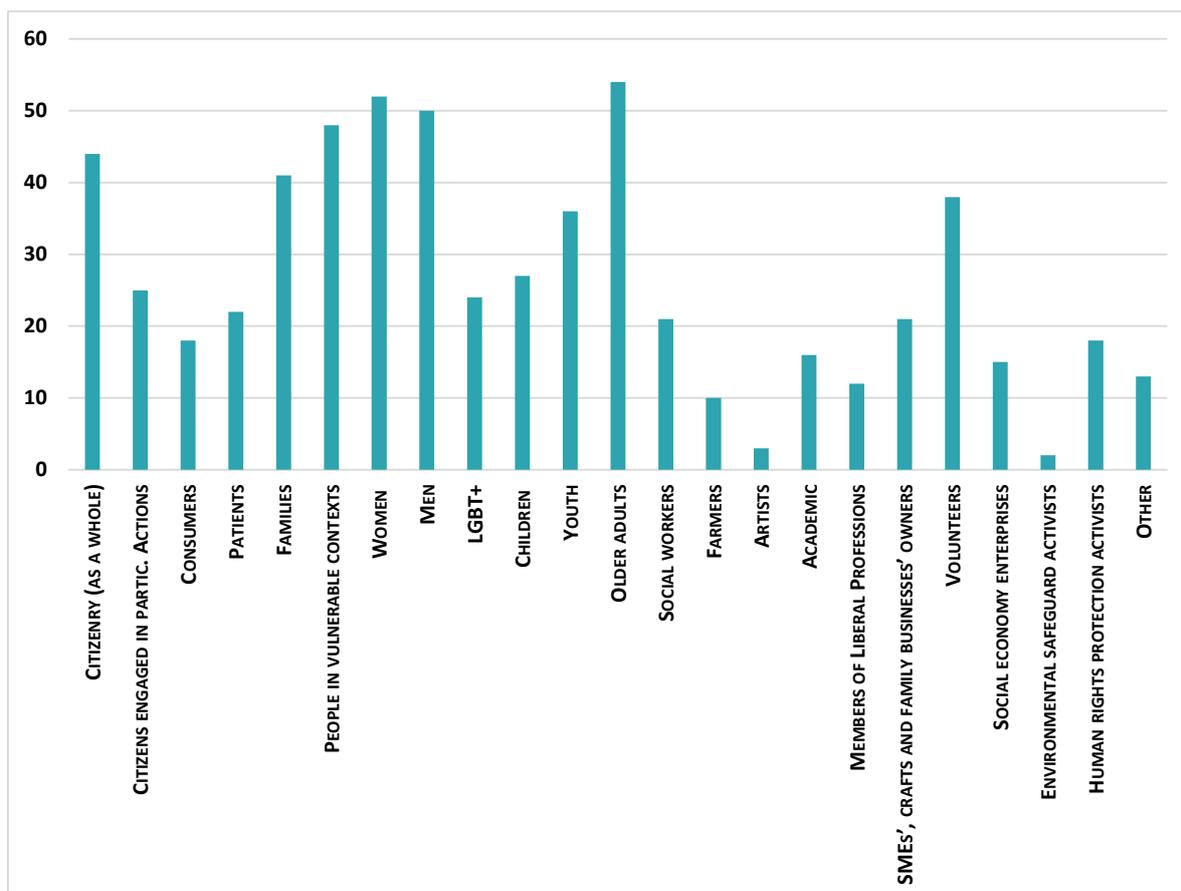


Figure 35. Types of stakeholders who benefitted from the new initiatives

[Q25A] If you have ticked the “People in vulnerable contexts” category in the previous question, please specify.

The respondents who ticked “people living in vulnerable contexts” as target groups for their initiatives were asked to specify the type of vulnerability. Results are provided for all the sample in Figure 34 and for the sub-sets of respondents corresponding to the activity areas “Associational Life” and Social Economy in Figures 35 and 36.

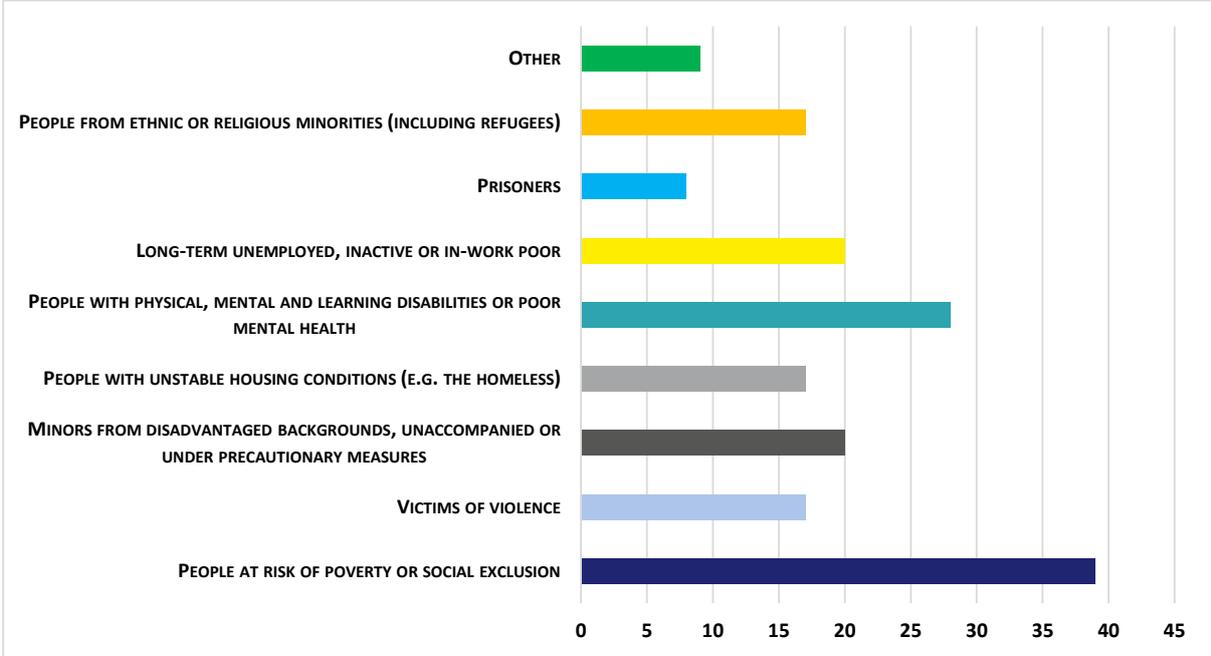


Figure 36. Main categories of people in vulnerable contexts that benefited from the new CSOs' initiatives

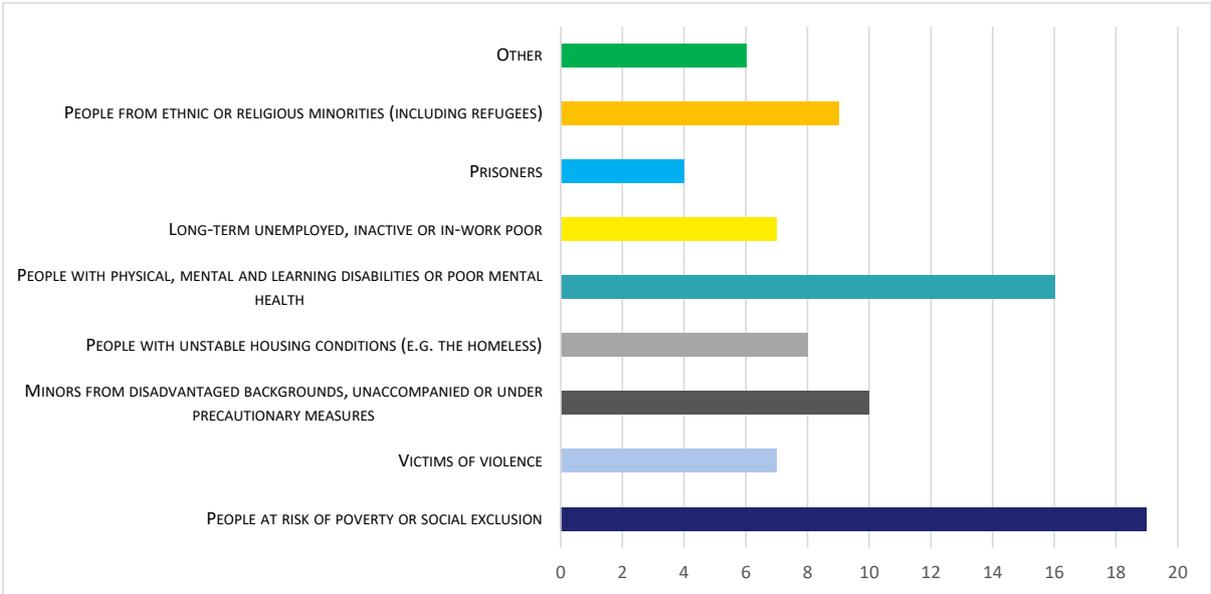


Figure 37. Main categories of people in vulnerable contexts that benefited from the new CSOs' initiatives – ASSOCIATIONAL LIFE

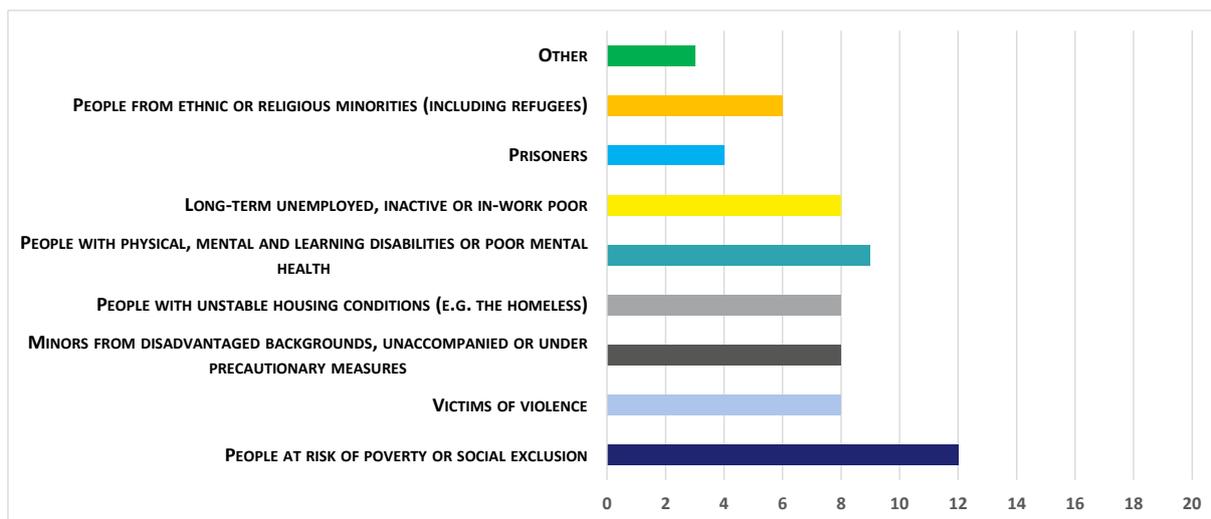


Figure 38. Main categories of people in vulnerable contexts that benefited from the new CSOs' initiatives – SOCIAL ECONOMY

[Q25B] If you have ticked the “consumers” category in the previous question, please specify the kind of interest or relevant issue your CSO is working to protect or deal with.

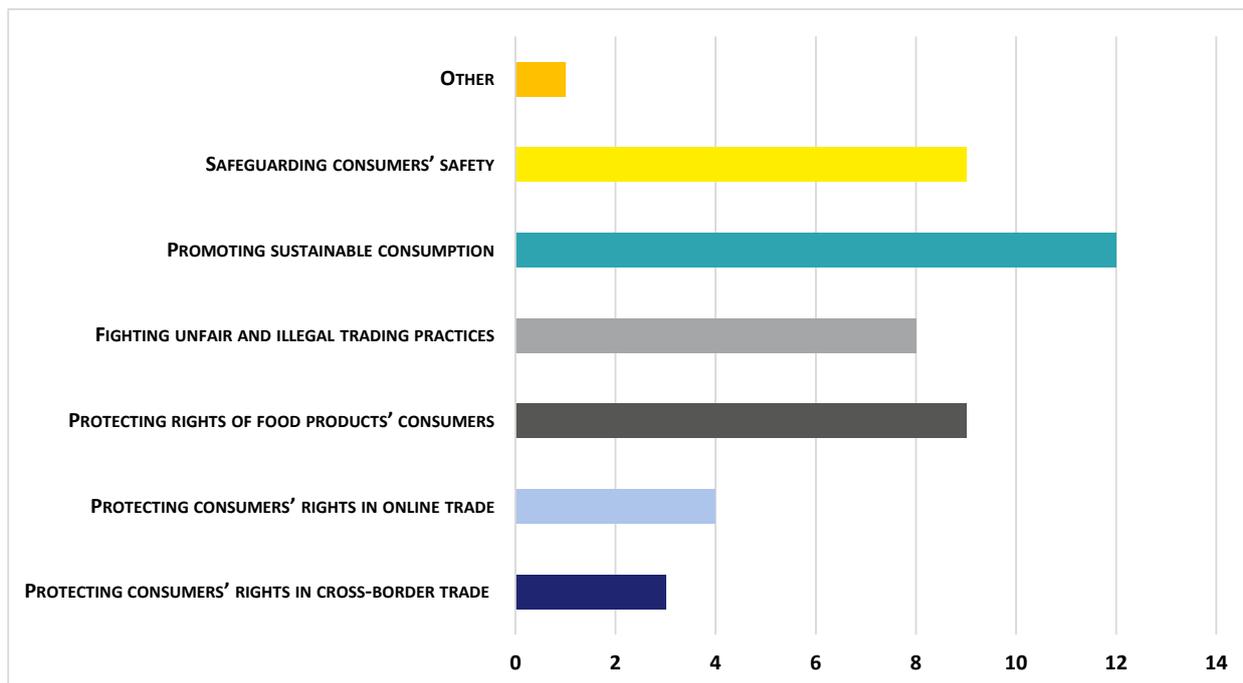


Figure 39. Main categories of consumers that benefited from the new CSOs' initiatives

[Q26] Are these new activities in line with your mission?

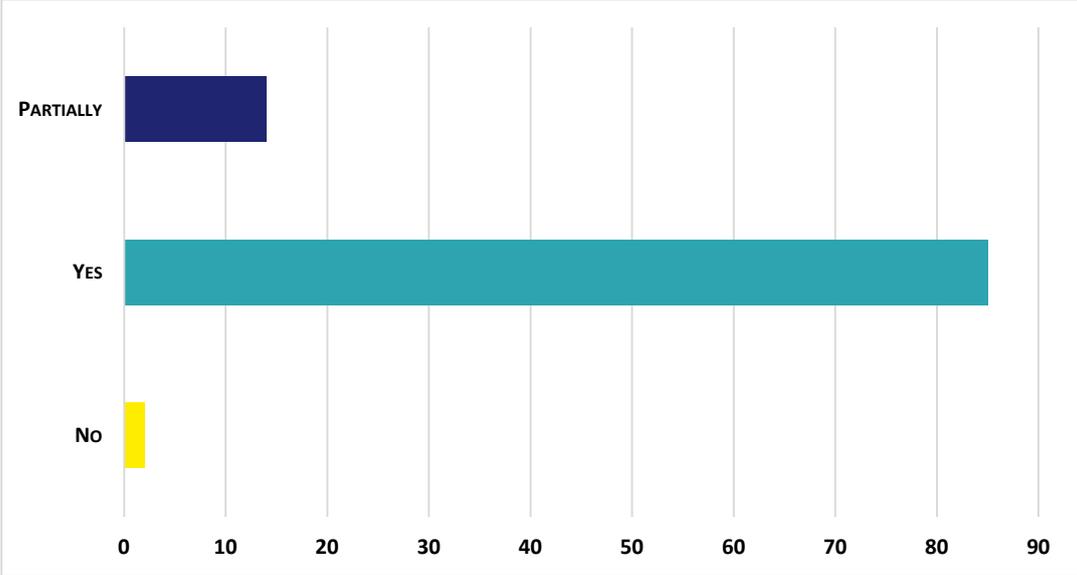


Figure 40. Answers provided by the participants when asked whether the new or adapted activities were aligned with their CSO' mission or not

[Q28] In your opinion, was the activity successful?

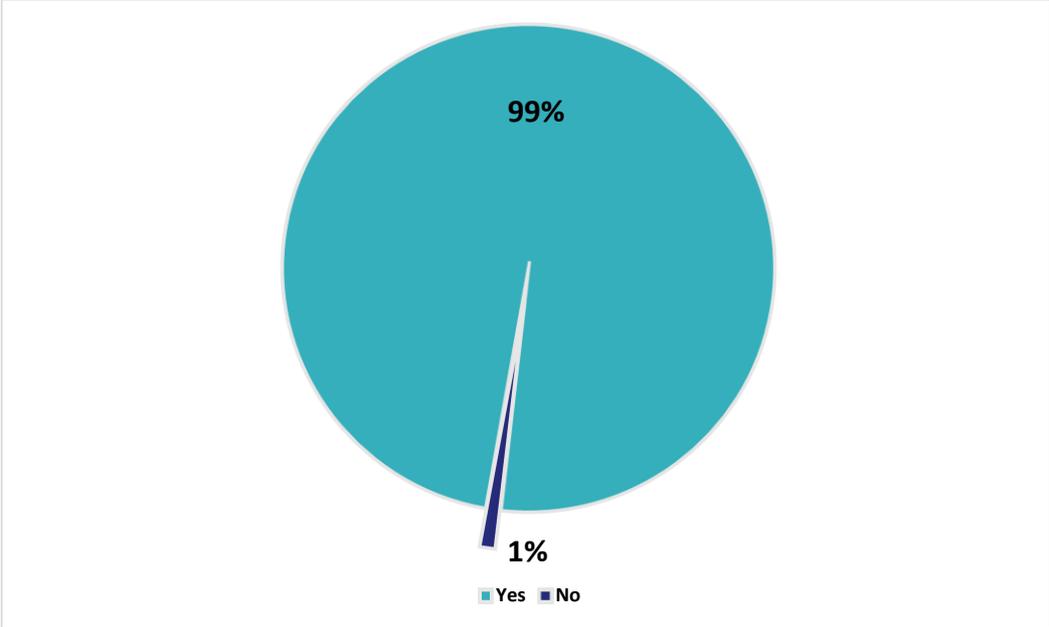


Figure 41. Opinion of the respondents when they were asked whether the activities implemented by the CSOs were successful

[Q29] Did your organisation rely on any digital technology to put in place the novel service, initiative or activity you have illustrated in the previous question?

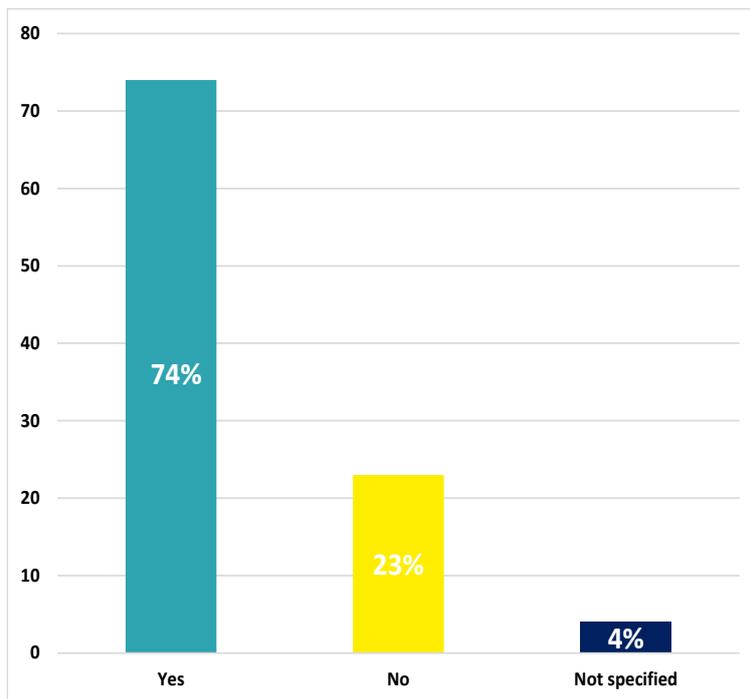


Figure 42. Reliance of the CSOs on any digital technology to put in place the novel service, initiative or activity

[Q34] Are you monitoring/have you monitored the satisfaction of your members and/or the target groups addressed by the new or adapted services?

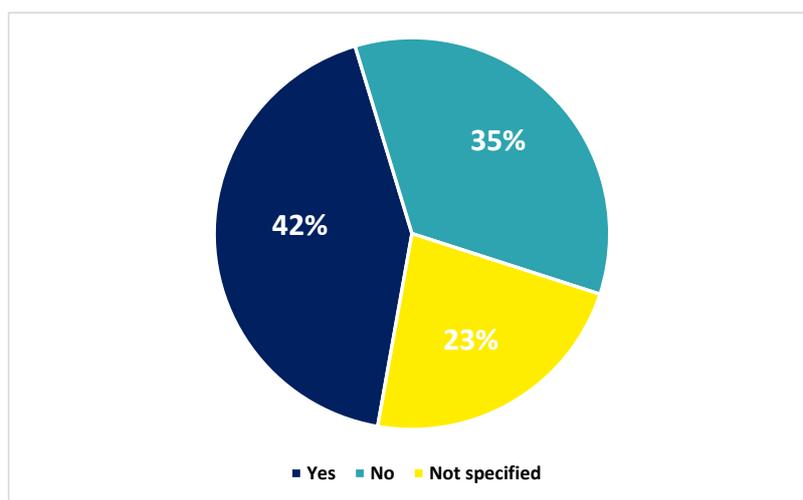


Figure 43. CSOs' answers to the question "Are you monitoring/have you monitored the satisfaction of your members and/or the target groups addressed by the new or adapted services?"

[Q36] Are you monitoring/have you monitored the impacts achieved through the new or adapted services, initiatives, or activities on the addressed members or target groups?

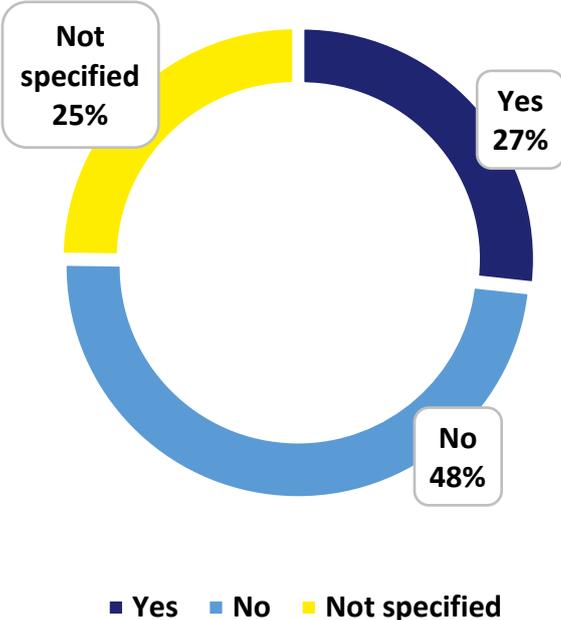


Figure 44. CSOs' answers when asked whether they are monitoring the impacts of their new or adapted COVID-19 related actions

[Q37] If you have answered yes to the previous question, what indicators are you measuring/have you measured?

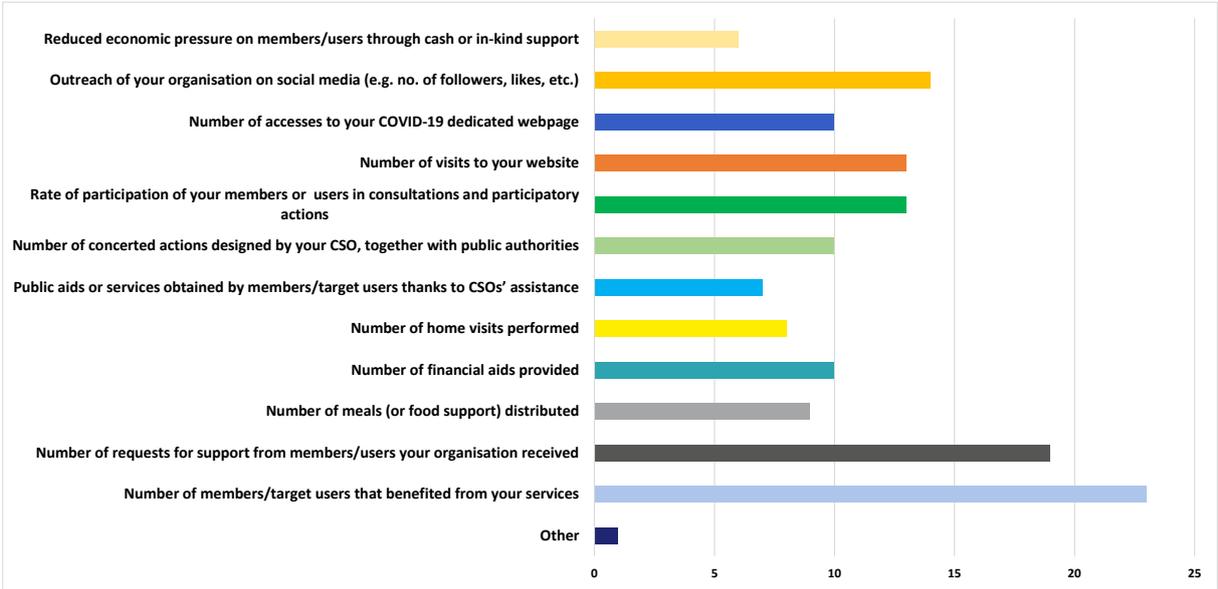


Figure 45. Indicators used to measure the impact of CSOs' actions

[Q40] Did you need to contract new human resources for these new or adapted measures?

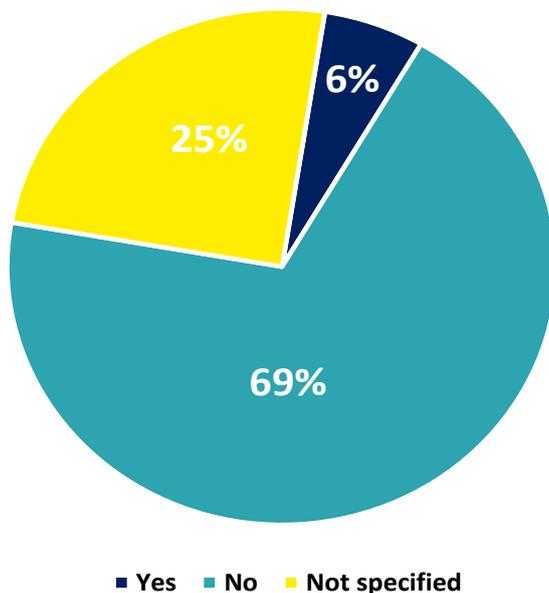


Figure 46. CSOs that needed to hire new human resources

[Q42] Did you need to dismiss or temporarily lay off human resources with these new or adapted activities?

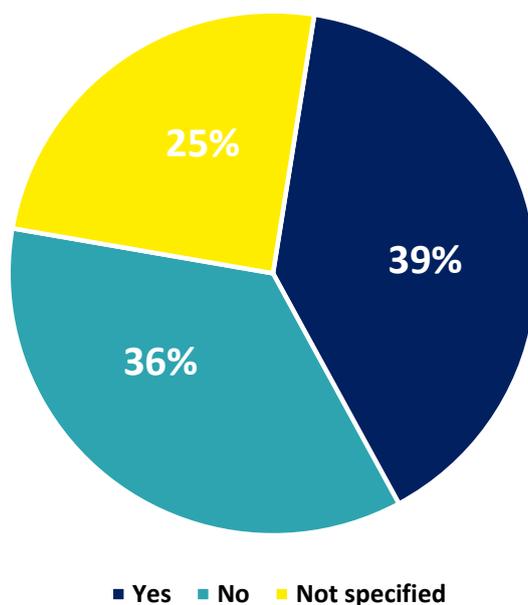


Figure 47. CSOs that needed to dismiss human resources

[Q40 bis] Did you need to contract new human resources for these new or adapted measures? (split by EESC category)

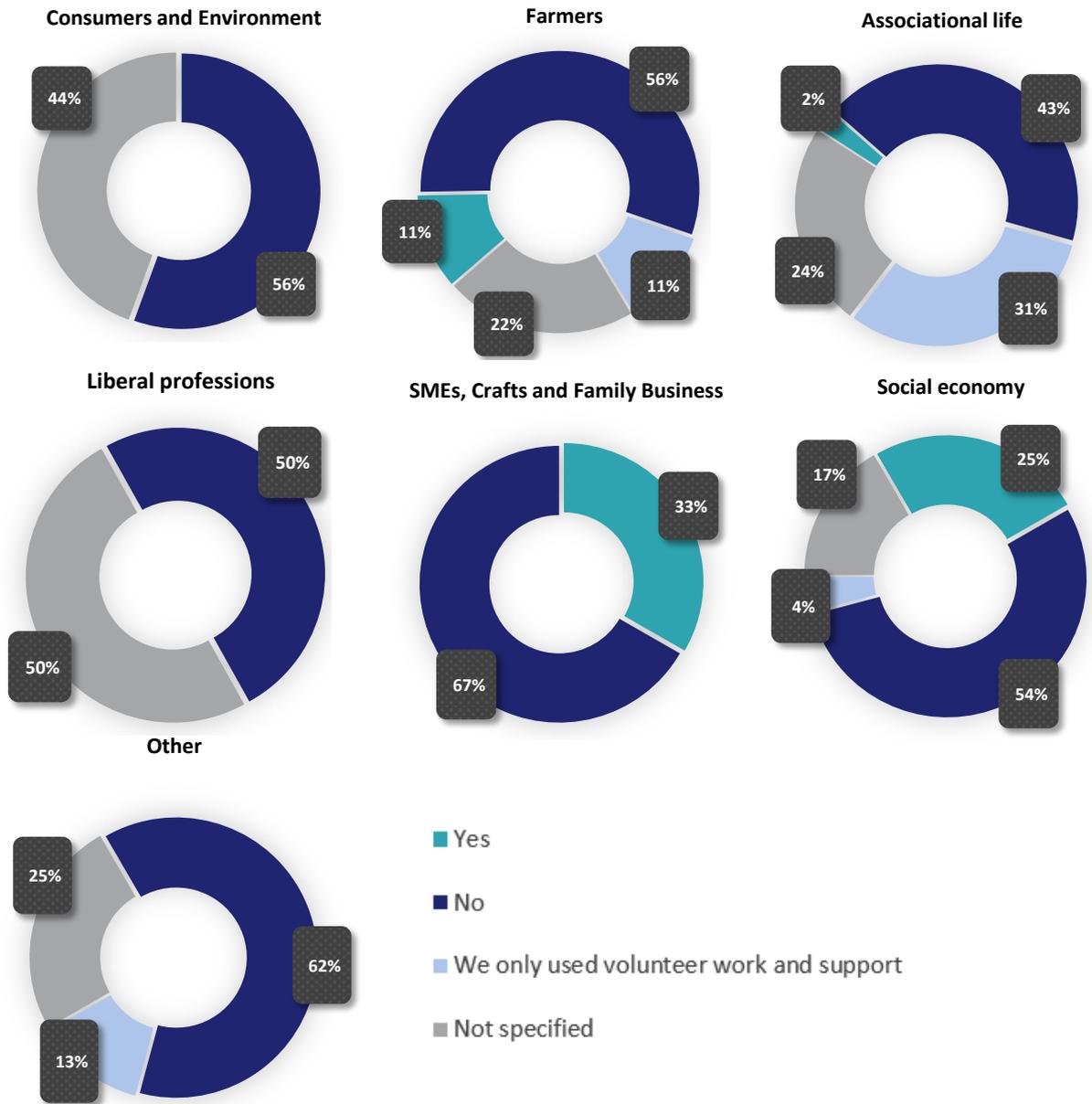


Figure 48. Answer to the question "Did your CSOs have to hire new staff" – A graph for each EESC category

[Q45] Did these new or adapted activities imply an increase of costs?

[Q46] If you answered yes to the previous question, please indicate in which area/s the costs increase.

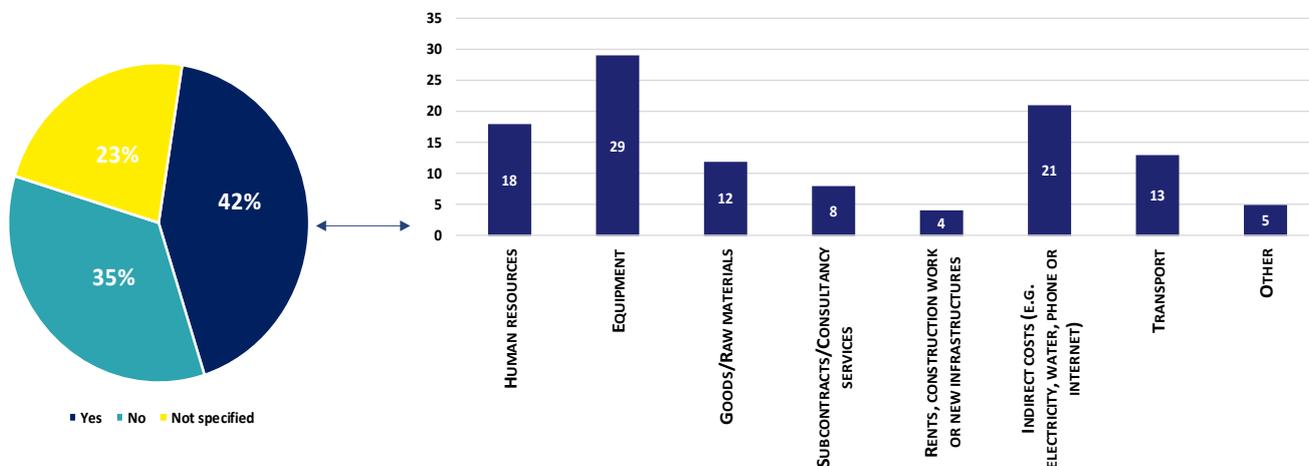


Figure 49. CSOs that have experienced an increase in the costs they usually afford to run their activities (including specification of the most affected cost categories)

[Q51] What is the estimated variation in your organisation's balance sheet for 2020, when compared to 2019?

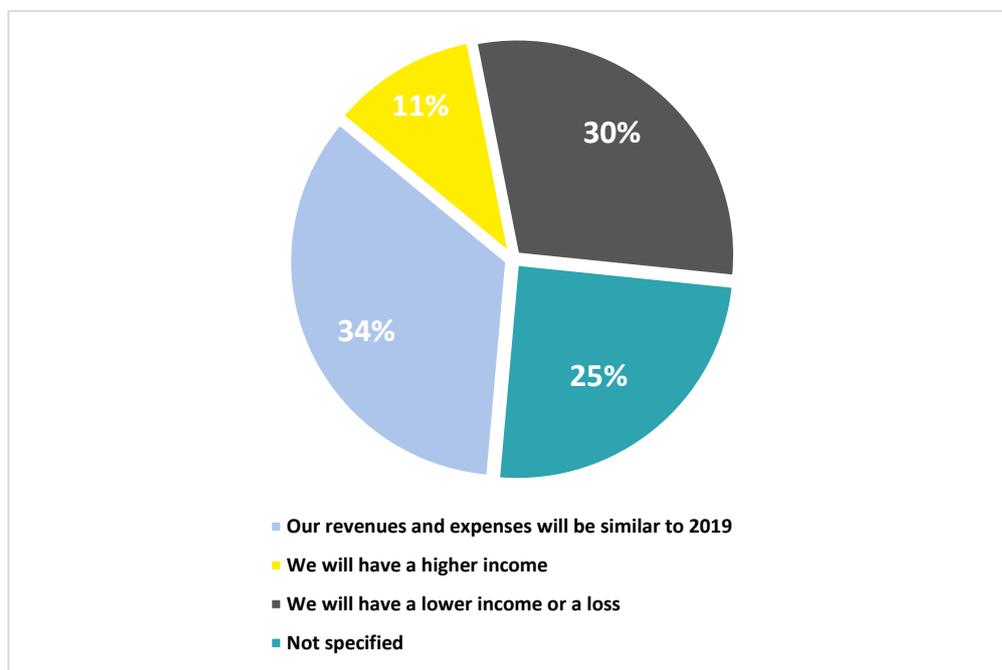


Figure 50. Estimated variation in your organisation's balance sheet for 2020, when compared to 2019

[Q52] Please indicate from what sources do you fund (either monetary or in-kind) the new or adapted services, activities or initiatives?

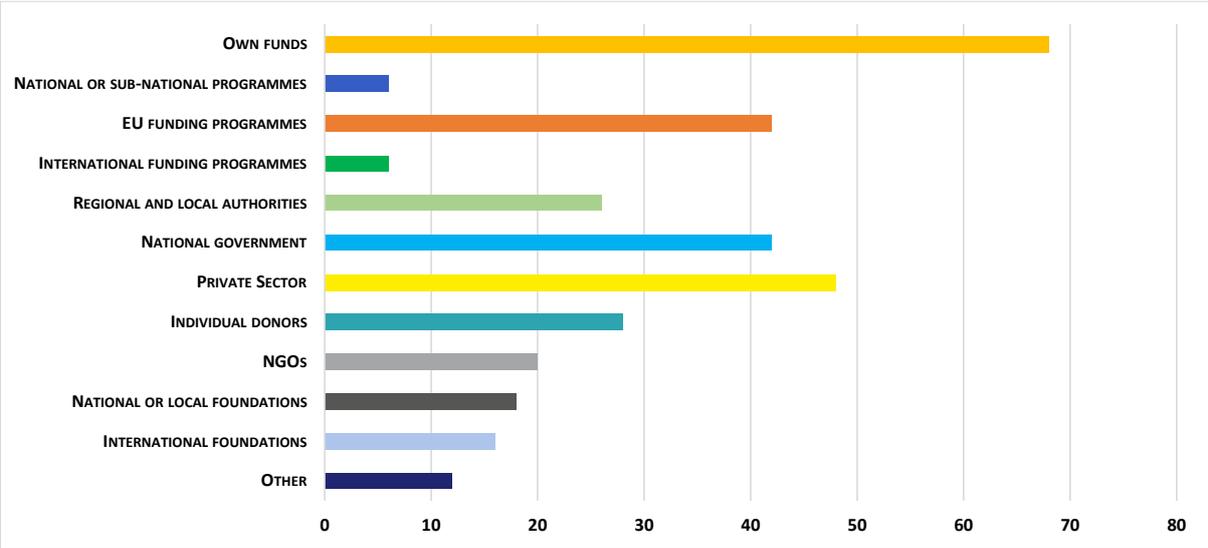


Figure 51. Sources that funded the new or adapted services, activities or initiatives

[Q53] Did your organisation need to acquire specific materials to continue its ordinary activity or offer the newly settled services?

[Q54] If you have answered yes to the previous question, could you specify which types of materials the organisation had to acquire?

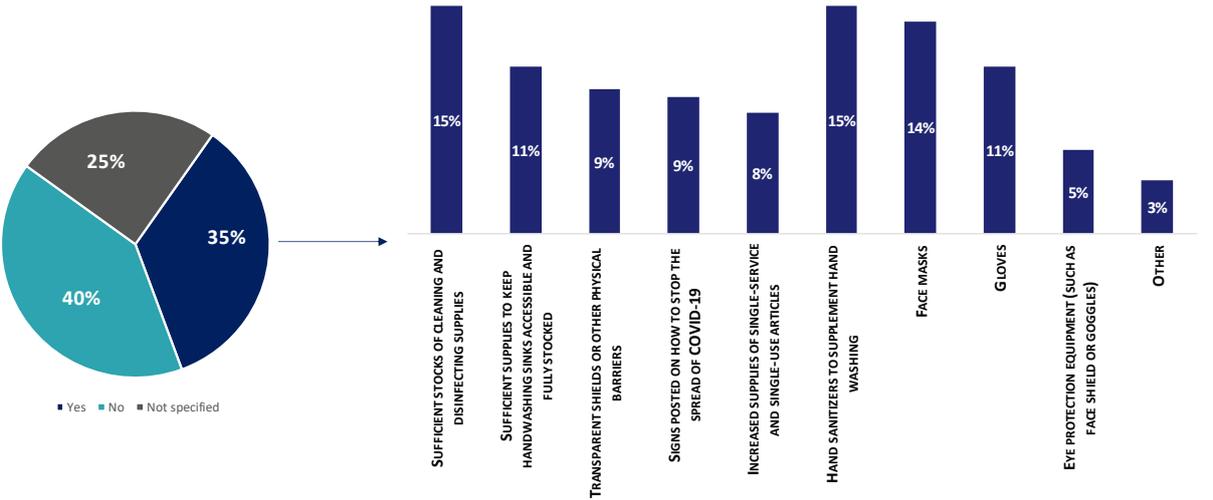


Figure 52. CSOs' answers to the question "Did your organisation need to acquire specific materials to continue its ordinary activity or offer the newly settled services?"

[Q55] Did your organisation need to acquire new equipment or adapt existing infrastructure to secure compliance with the prescription of the local regulatory/health authorities?

[Q56] Regarding the previous question, please tick one or more options among the ones proposed here.

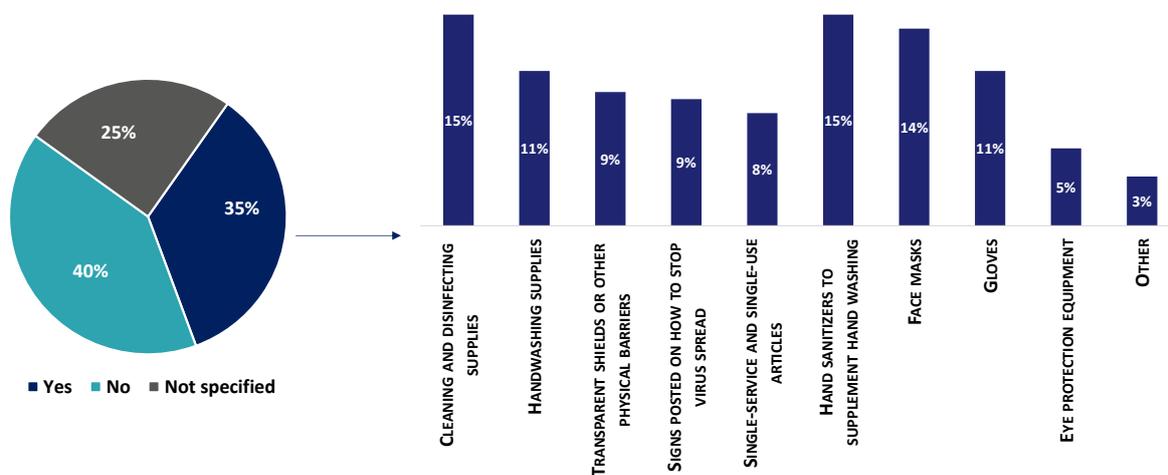


Figure 53. Percentage of CSOs that had to acquire new equipment

[Q57] Did the organisation acquire new ICT systems or platforms to keep members and/or users connected, communicate and provide them with assistance?

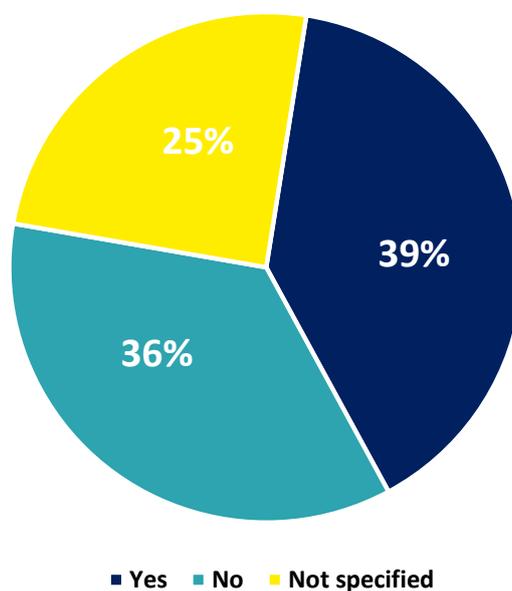


Figure 54. Percentage of CSOs which had to acquire new ICT systems or platforms

[Q58] Has the organisation taken specific actions to make the shift to telework possible?

[Q59] If you have answered yes to the previous question, please specify whether your organisation has equipped the workers who are in the possibility to telework with any of the following.

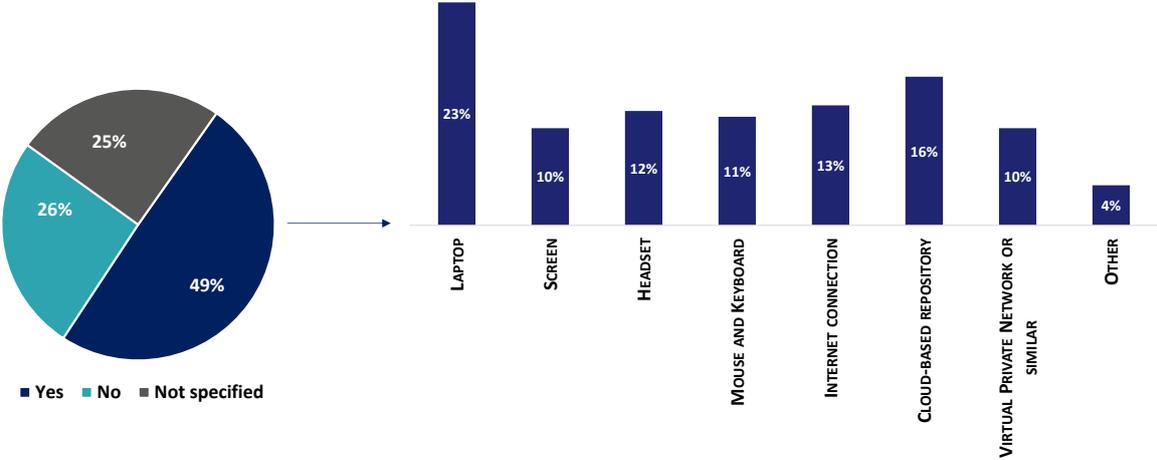


Figure 55. CSOs that adopted measures to ease smart working with indication of the equipment/tools they provided to workers

[Q72] Do you think there is a risk that your organisation will permanently shut down because of this crisis?

[Q73] Regarding the previous question, can you estimate when this closure could occur?

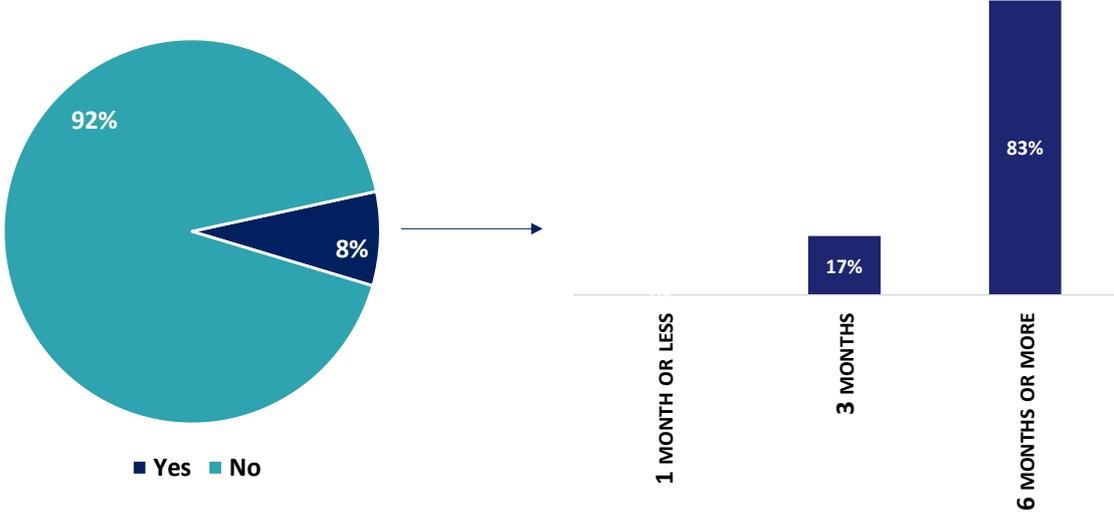


Figure 56. Percentage of CSOs that declared they feel the risk that their organisation will permanently shut down due to COVID-19 and when they foresee this will eventually occur

[Q60] Please state how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the impact of COVID-19 on CSOs in your country.

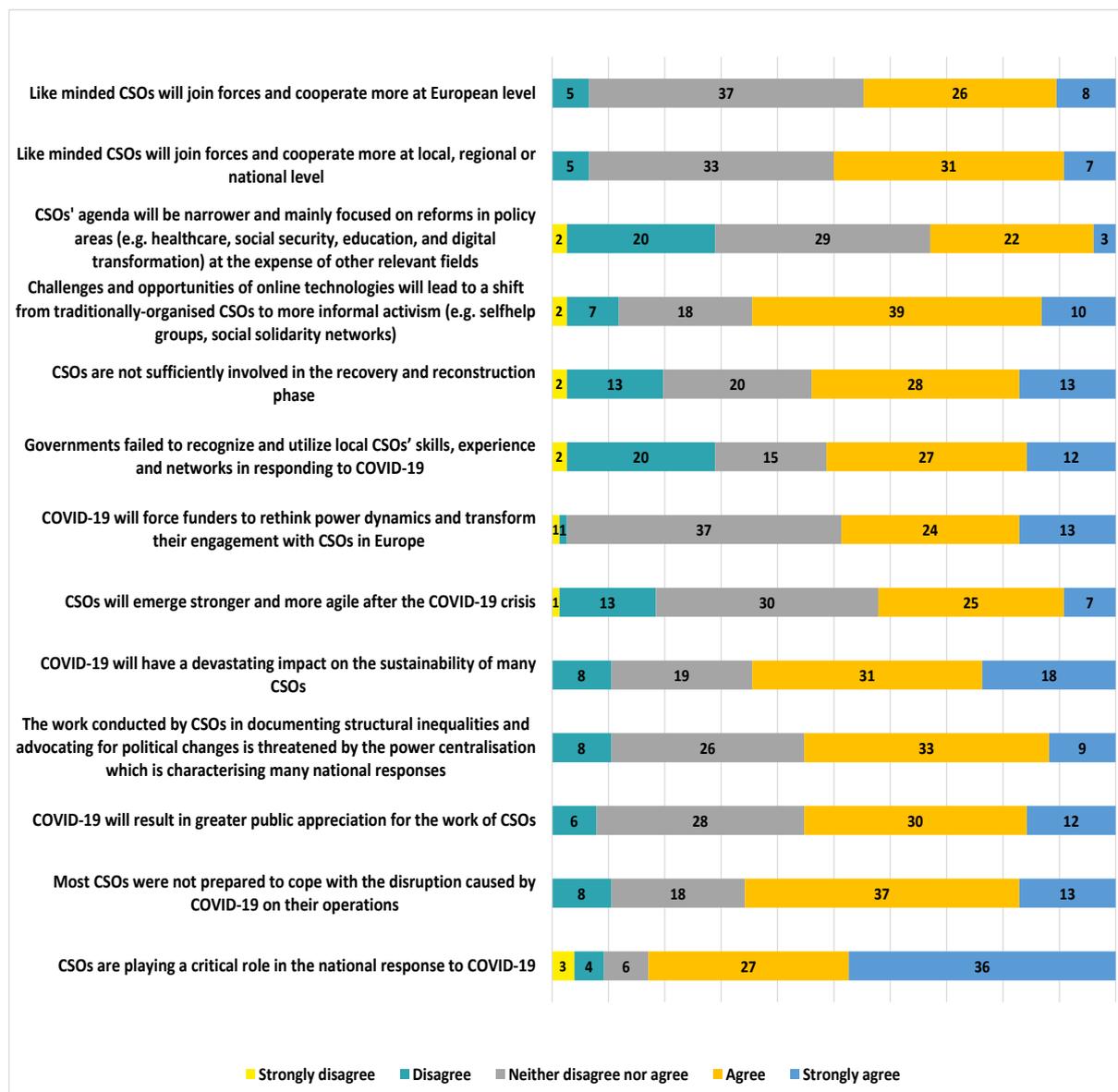


Figure 57. Opinions of the participants on a series of statements related to the future of CSOs

[Q61] Are you concerned about the fact that the adoption use of emergency measures may limit or impede CSOs' work in the provision of essential services to members and/or target groups?

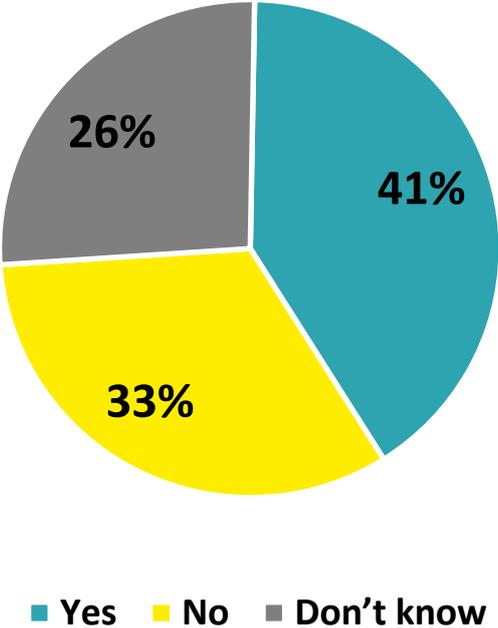


Figure 58. CSOs that stated they are concerned about the fact that COVID-19 emergency measure may limit their service provision capacities

[Q63] Many countries have adopted special legislations to authorise rapid actions pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the country/countries where your organisation operates, are you concerned about their duration and effects on the capacity of CSOs to promote rights and democracy?

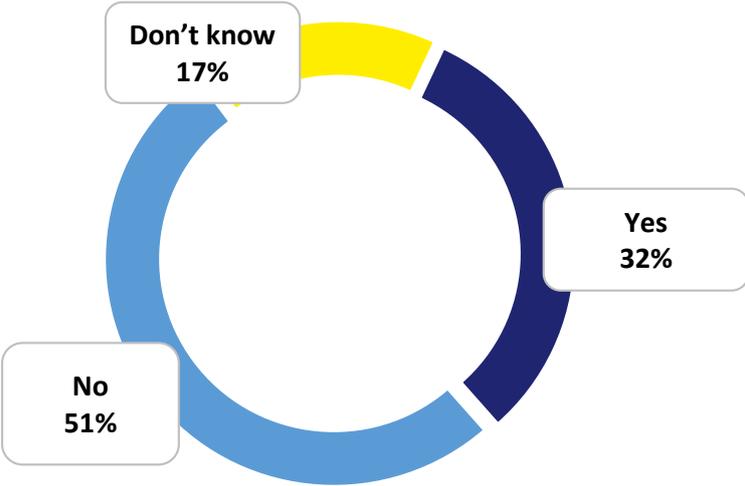


Figure 59. CSOs that stated they are concerned about the effect of COVID-19 special legislations on their capacity to promoting rights and democracy

[65] Did the pandemic and the eventual reorganisation of your activities imply a substantial change on your capacities to enable societal impact as CSO?

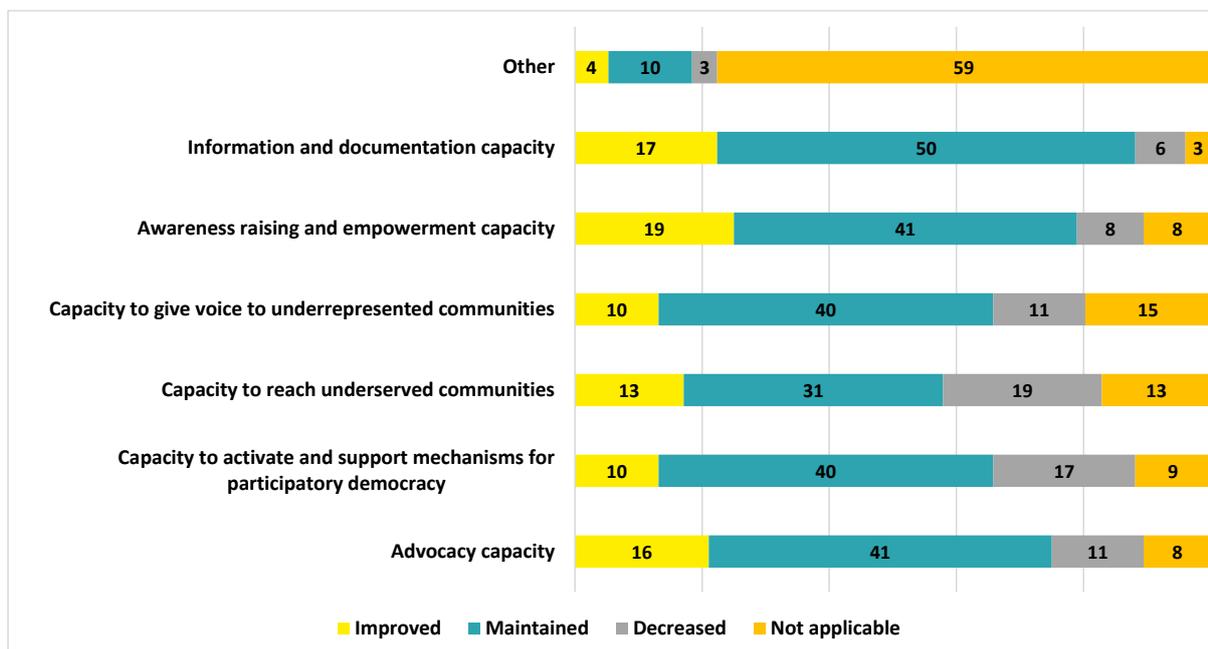


Figure 60. Impacts of the pandemic on the capacities of CSOs to enable societal change

[Q67] How have your operations been affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?

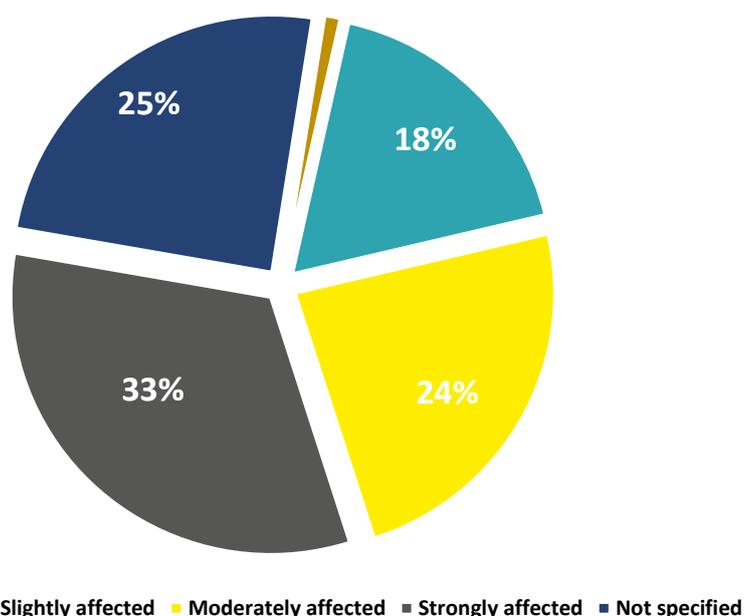


Figure 61. CSOs that have declared to what extent their operations have been affected by COVID-19

[Q68] Has the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic affected your organisation in any of the following ways?

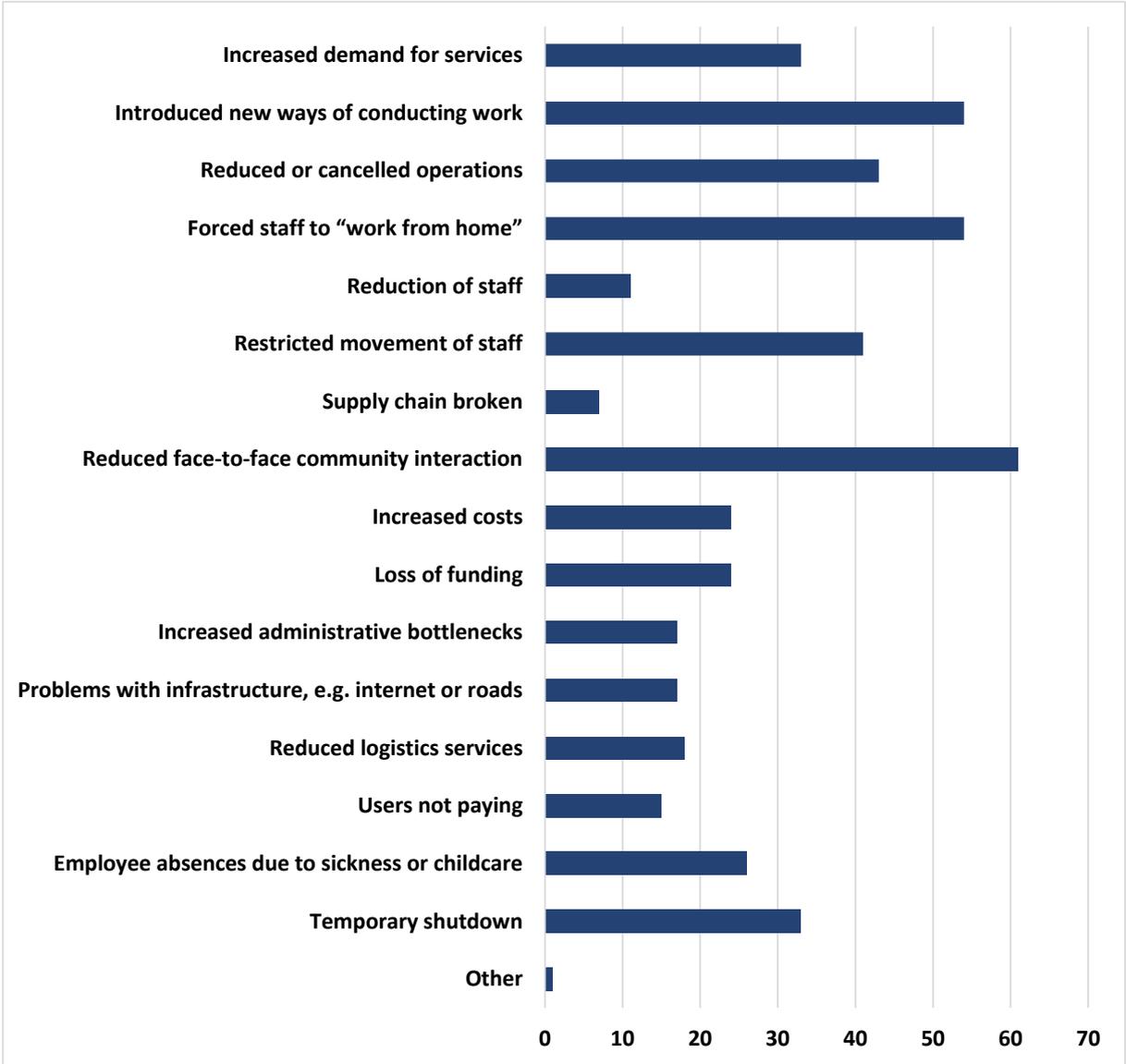


Figure 62. Number of CSOs that have indicated the diverse ways COVID-19 has affected their organisations

[Q74] If the pandemic threatens the existence of your organization, what are the main threats?

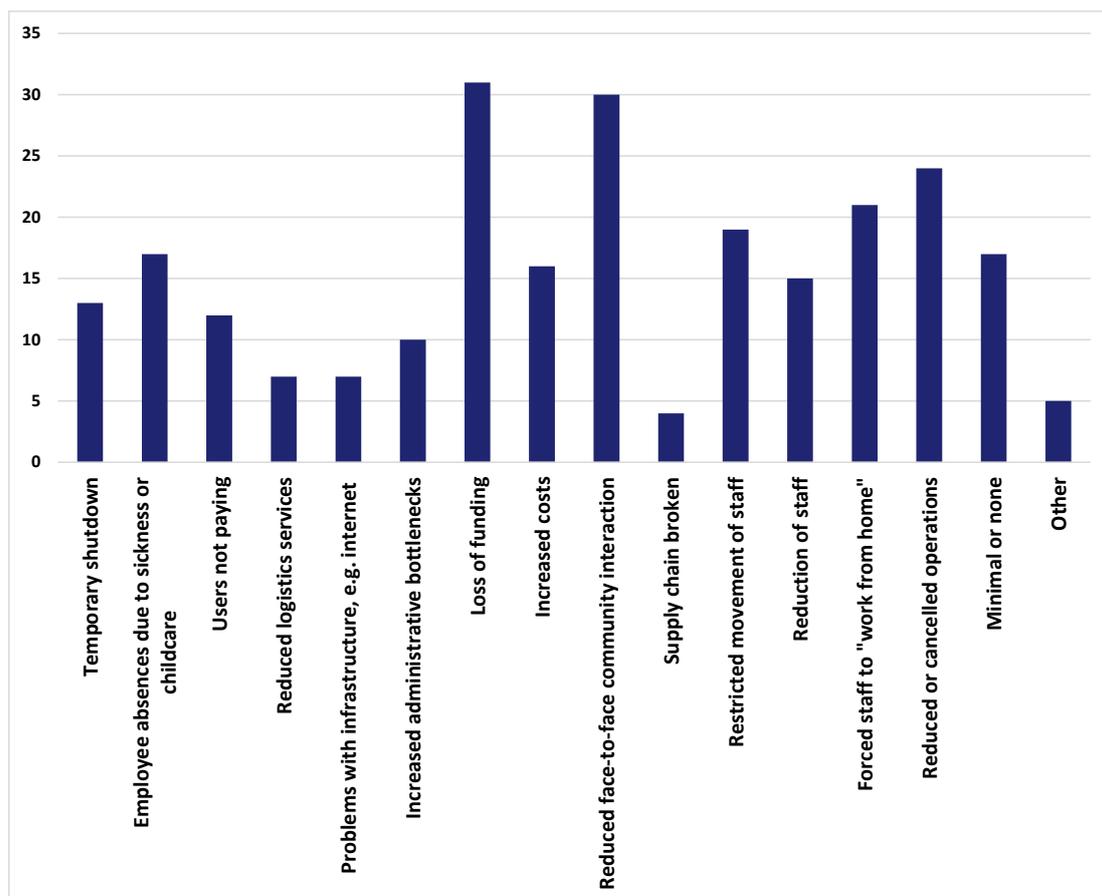


Figure 63. Major threats challenging the existence of CSOs

[Q75] Please select the top three government measures that would be most helpful to your organisation, in order to cope with the COVID-19 crisis

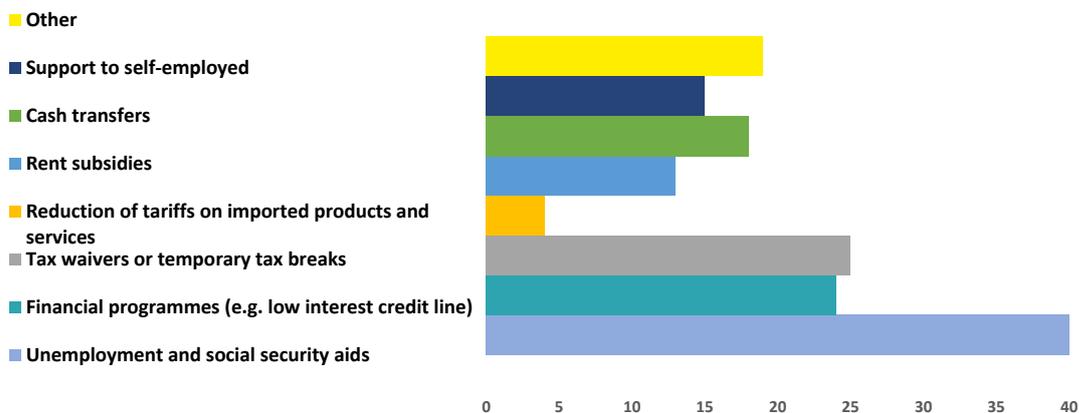


Figure 64. Government measures that the CSOs consider most useful to cope with crisis effects

[Q76] How adequate and relevant were, in your opinion, the government COVID-19 assistance programmes for your organisation?

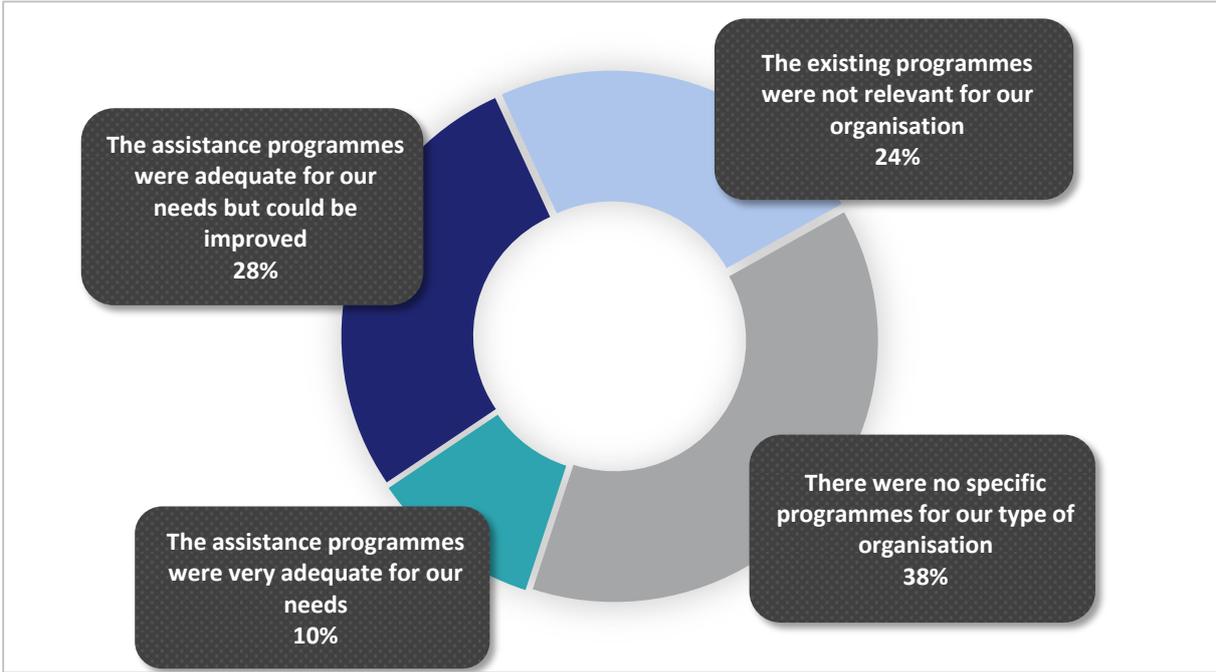


Figure 65. Relevance of the government aid programmes for the CSOs

[Q77] How easy was to access information and benefits from these COVID-related CSOs' assistance programmes?

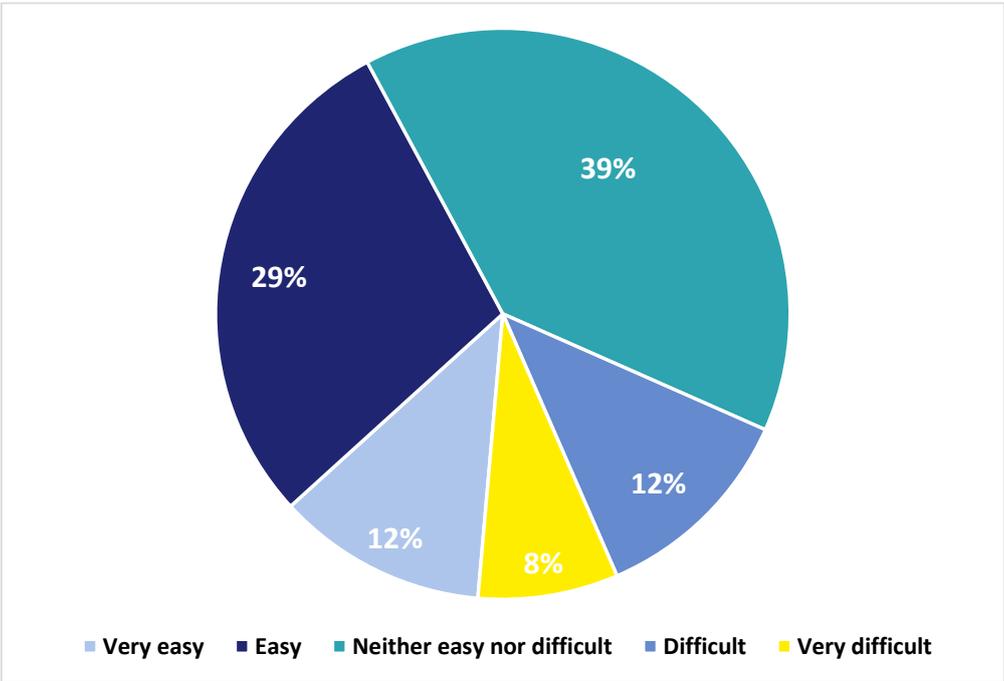


Figure 66. Easiness for CSOs to access specific COVID-19 assistance programmes

[Q78] Thinking in the upcoming months, what type of support does your organisation need to work in the new and changing environment?

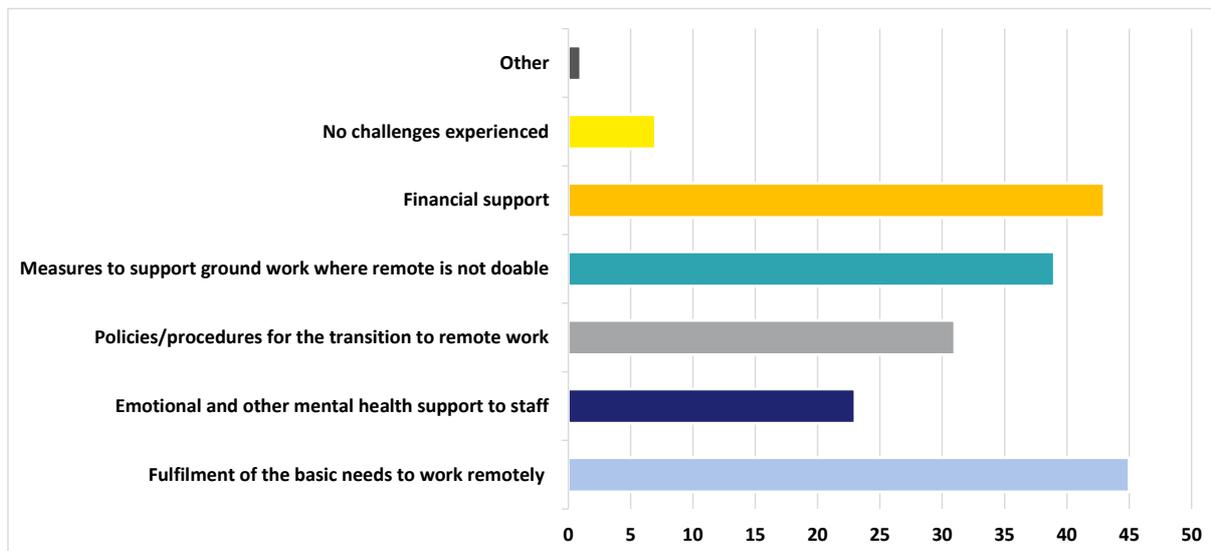


Figure 67. Most needed types of support for CSOs

[Q79] What type of (new) skills does your organisation need to work in the new and changing environment?

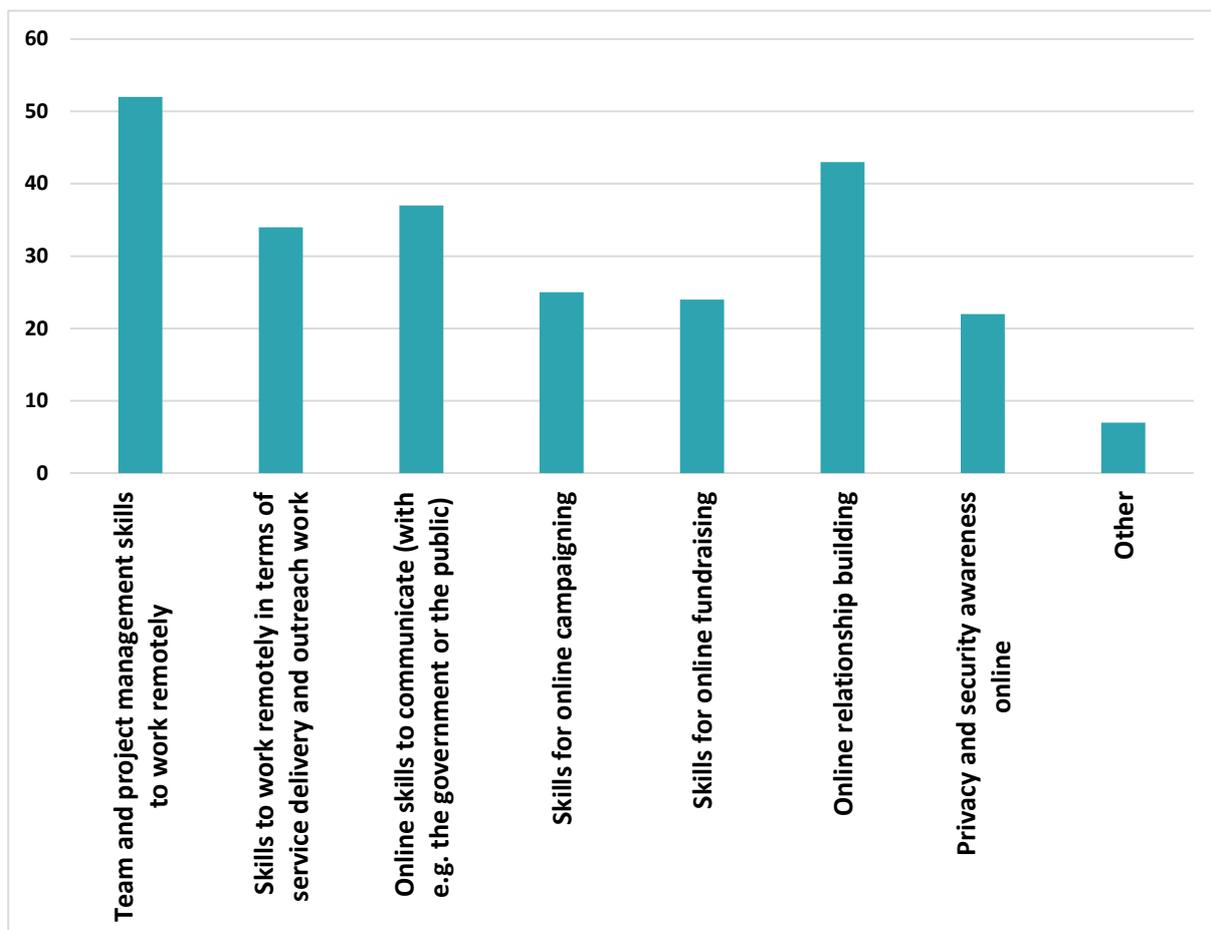


Figure 68. New types of skills most needed by CSOs to cope with COVID-19 induced changes

Annex 3 – Catalogue of new and adapted COVID-19 related initiatives put in place by CSOs

The catalogue has been published separately and can be accessed on the Diversity Europe Group's website at the following link: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/members-groups/groups/diversity-europe-group-iii/publications>.



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