



Studies carried out in **2020**

COMPENDIUM



European Economic
and Social Committee



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Boosting the use of artificial intelligence in Europe's micro, small and medium-sized enterprises

The diversity and potential of artificial intelligence (AI) applications are nearly limitless. Today, a growing number of businesses and citizens unknowingly rely on AI-driven solutions to enhance their work and life. As these innovative technologies become increasingly mainstream, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) should adopt AI to maintain their competitive advantage. This study will shed light on the opportunities and challenges of AI uptake for Europe's MSMEs with an in-depth sectoral and EU Member State analysis. Effective actions are proposed that could boost AI uptake in MSMEs and include:

- Supporting education and training systems to ensure AI skills demanded by the labour market are acquired and general knowledge on AI is gained, which in turn enables civil society members to be responsible and informed users of AI devices and applications
- Ensuring MSMEs, the largest employers in Europe, have a targeted support system from finance and infrastructure to data availability and interoperability, allowing for a successful pan-European AI adoption
- Raising awareness about issues such as cybersecurity and the potential impact of data bias
- Guiding best practices, promoting success stories, and sharing experiences that can serve as a starting point for a broad AI uptake among MSMEs

The study presents a toolbox for both policymakers and MSMEs to support the uptake of AI within MSMEs and preserve their economic relevance in Europe.

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

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.

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Contact: secretdegroupeiii@eesc.europa.eu

Shifting priorities towards post-COVID sustainable reconstruction and recovery

The study provides an overview of the extent to which a selection of national post-COVID-19 Recovery and Resilience Plans have adopted the principles of wellbeing economy and sustainable development. A key focus of the report is assessing the extent to which representatives of civil society have contributed to the plans and on their envisaged future role in the implementation of the planned reforms and investments. Sustainability has been framed according to two dimensions: environmental and social. At the outset, the study defines key principles of both of these dimensions together with relevant references to principal policy documents. National plans from five EU Member States - Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Poland and Spain - have been screened, with emphasis on two aspects: first, how the plans address both dimensions of sustainability and second, the involvement of civil society in plan development. The screening was complemented by interviews with relevant stakeholders and additional desk research to formulate conclusions and recommendations on how governments can make the process of post-pandemic recovery more sustainable and more inclusive for civil society.

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The definition of worker in the platform economy

This research report has been produced in the context of a project entitled ‘The definition of worker in the platform economy’ (CES/FSA/09/2020), which was commissioned by the workers’ group of the European Economic and Social Committee. The report aims to contribute to the debates on platform workers’ risks and regulatory solutions. The report explores the defining features of platform work in terms of prevalence, socio-demographic characteristics, algorithmic management and working conditions; substantiated by a comparison of four national responses to the emergence of platform work (Finland, Germany, Hungary and Spain). The report concludes by proposing a legal response aiming to improve labour rights and social protections for platform workers and other non-standard workers, based on the development of an EU definition of worker.

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Contact: gr2@eesc.europa.eu

New trends in the development of volunteering in the European Union

Volunteering happens when volunteer energy (willingness, capability and availability to volunteer) and volunteer opportunities (possibility to volunteer) are matched. The objective of this study is to create classifications of volunteer energy and volunteer opportunities, providing a qualitative overview of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) that volunteering is facing in the EU.

National volunteering rates can be explained by institutional factors (non-profit arrangements, volunteering discourse and religion) influencing volunteer energy and volunteering infrastructure factors (volunteer profiles, volunteer scenarios and third parties) influencing opportunities. The fact of there being abundant opportunities or a lack thereof is more important than a lack of energy. Volunteer energy is available in most countries, as spontaneous volunteering has repeatedly shown.

The most important conclusion of this research is the pan-European development of two components in the volunteering infrastructure: third party involvement and spontaneous volunteering. Third party involvement consists of corporate volunteering (companies), service learning (educational institutes) and days of service (e.g. the "72 hours without compromise" initiative). Spontaneous volunteering is driven by social media enabling individuals to self-organise. Especially in countries lacking a volunteering tradition, these new volunteer profiles and volunteer scenarios are attractive for younger generations. Policy should pay attention to expanding the involvement of third parties and removing the obstacles to spontaneous volunteering.

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From the COVID-19 emergency measures to defend employment and health and safety in the workplaces, to a new strengthened system of Industrial relations

Best practice examples of social partner involvement in measures and initiatives aimed at palliating the socio-economic impact of the pandemic

During 2020-2021, in all EU Member States, governments as well as national, regional and local administrations and affiliated institutions (such as public employment services) have sought to introduce diverse measures to mitigate the potentially devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on economies, labour markets and whole societies.

Often, also businesses or employers' organisations and trade unions or other bodies of employee representation have been involved, whereby the role of social partner organisations in participating in the design of or influencing these measures differs widely across the EU27.

This study provides an overview of the involvement of social partners in measures to cushion the negative impacts of the pandemic in the EU27. Moreover, it identifies and analyses social partner initiatives in selected EU countries and their potential transferability into other national, economic and social contexts. It can be shown that the degree of social partner involvement tends to be decisive for a measure's effectiveness. However, its successful transferability into another context usually requires similar industrial relations systems as well as similar institutional settings, procedures and cultures.

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