



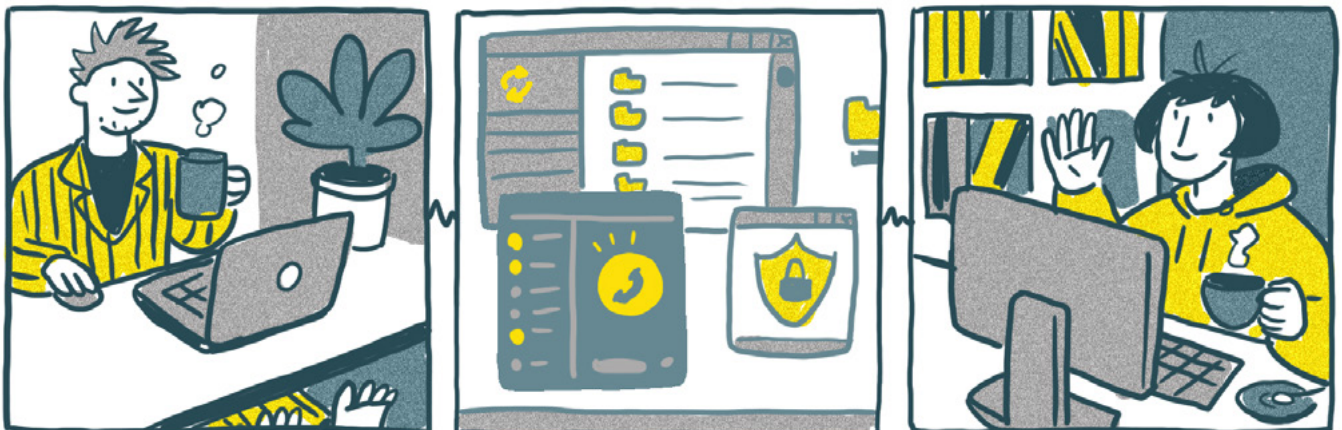
# REMOTE COLLABORATION ON H2020 PROJECTS

April 2020



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A survey conducted to understand implications for delivery of EC-funded projects during the COVID-19 crisis reveal the situation significantly affects the workflow across all countries and organisations. COVID-19 significantly changed working practices. Many events have been cancelled and a majority turned to remote work using off-the-shelf software. Only 11% of the respondents use an open source platform and only 5% use a platform developed within the European Union. Study results examine the challenges of remote working practices in particular how to hold people's attention in an online meeting. The report concludes that the enforced requirement to adopt online tools may have consequences for working practices beyond the current time-frame. We may see a move to more use of open-source tools and sustained reliance on remote working, but people ultimately enjoy meeting in person and this is not likely to be phased out any time soon.



## INTRODUCTION

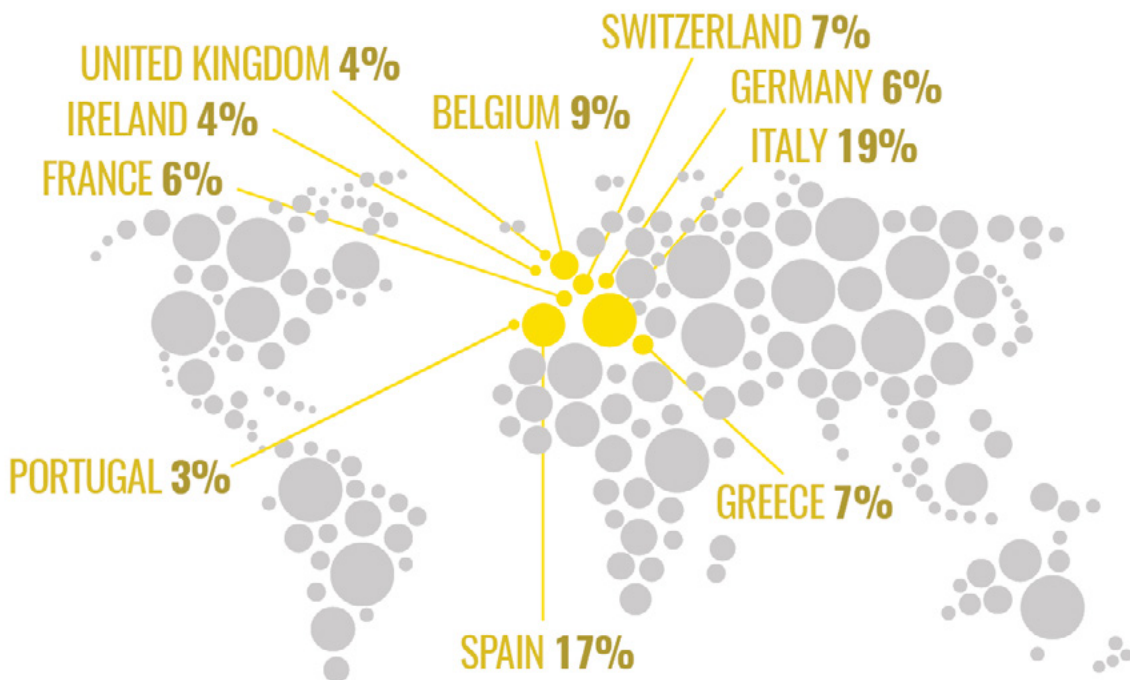
The COVID-19 crisis has led to a massive uptake in ICT solutions for remote working and interacting as governments, public authorities, big corporations, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and other institutions had to quickly shift their offline workflows into the online world.

EC-funded Horizon 2020 initiatives require coordination of operations and communications with many partners all over Europe and beyond. Martel conducted a survey in an effort to understand how organisations working on H2020 projects are adapting to remote working due to the COVID-19 crisis as well as the effect this is having on the overall ecosystem.

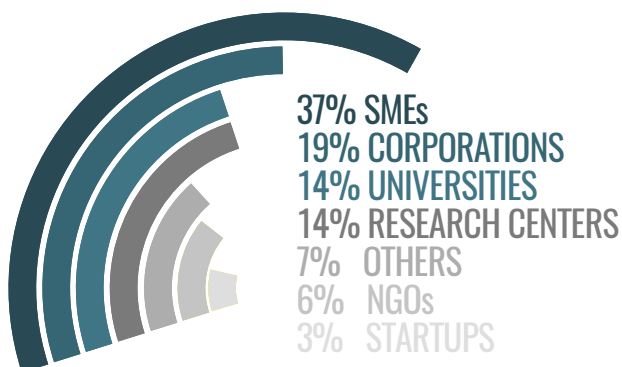
## METHOD AND SAMPLE

Martel designed and widely distributed an online survey during the initial stages of the COVID-19 lockdown in Europe (19 March 2020 - 27 March 2020). A total of **158 participants**, based in **26 different countries** completed the questionnaire.

Most of the respondents are working for SMEs (37%), corporations (19%), universities (14%), research centres (14%) and NGOs (6%). Of these organisations, 82% are involved in a project funded by the European Commission (EC). See the figure below for an overview of the sample.



**158**  
PARTICIPANTS



**82%**  
INVOLVED IN  
EC-FUNDED  
PROJECTS

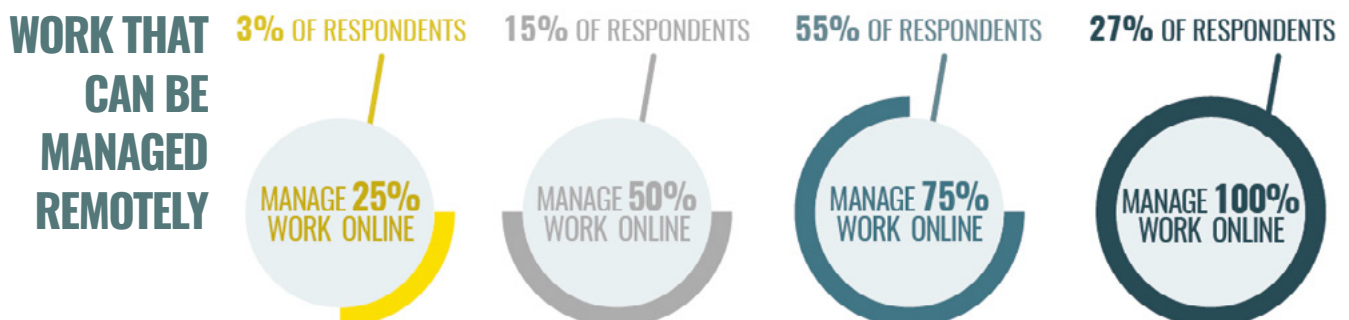
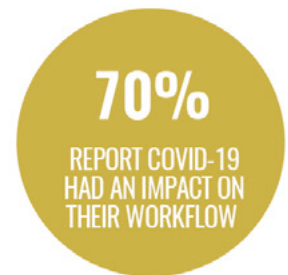
# + RESULTS

## EFFECTS OF THE EMERGENCY SITUATION ON WORKFLOW

Results show that **the COVID-19 crisis significantly affects the workflow** across all countries and organisations (70%). The main workflow disruption occurs in the areas of client and partners meetings (27%), marketing and communication (27%), research and innovation actions (19%) and sales negotiations (11%). In addition, 93% of the respondents indicated their **project's events planning has been disrupted** by the current COVID-19 containment measures.

Within EC projects, COVID-19 restrictions have led to the cancellation of workshops, event participation and conferences (26%), delay of projects' meetings (17%), cancelling demos and/or trials (13%) and delay of review meetings (12%). Despite the disruption the COVID-19 emergency caused, 55% of the respondents indicated that **75% of their project's work can be managed remotely** while 27% reported that 100% of their project's work can be managed remotely.

### MAIN AREAS OF WORKFLOW DISRUPTION




## RESULTS

### SOLUTION STRATEGIES

To manage operations during the emergency situation, a majority of **80% turned to remote work** and almost one third of this group (28%) did not work remotely before COVID-19.

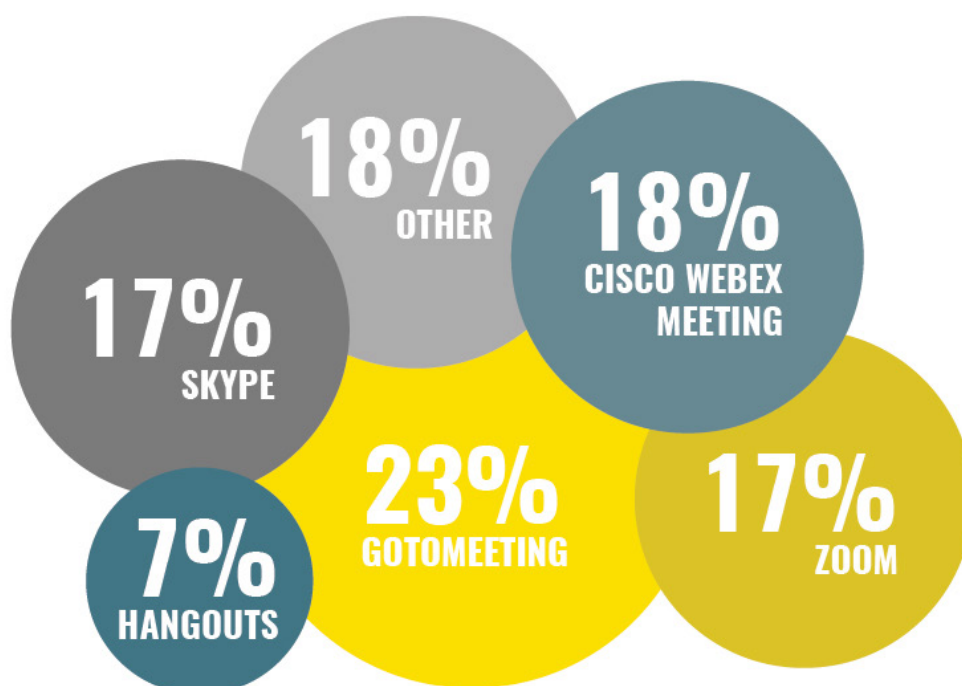
When holding remote meetings, only 11% of the respondents use an open source platform (e.g., Sylk WebRTC and Jitsi) and only 5% use a platform developed within the European Union (EU). The most commonly used off-the-shelf platforms for remote meetings are GoToMeeting (23%), Cisco Webex Meeting (18%), Zoom (17%) and Skype (17%).

**80%**   
ENABLED REMOTE WORKING  
TO COPE WITH COVID-19

**28%**   
DID NOT WORK REMOTELY  
BEFORE COVID-19

**11%**   
USE AN OPEN SOURCE PLATFORM  
FOR REMOTE WORKING

### POPULAR REMOTE COLLABORATION PLATFORMS





## RESULTS

### MAIN CHALLENGES OF REMOTE MEETINGS

Survey participants reported that remote meetings have several advantages, such as a **reduced travel time (31%) and environmental footprint (25%)**, but they also report challenges.

When convening a remote meeting, respondents see the following main challenges: **keeping the audience engaged (20%)**, **guaranteeing good audio/video (15%)** and **getting input from all attendees (14%)**.

When participating in remote meetings, keeping the same high attention level for the entire meeting (21%), being distracted with other work-related tasks (20%) and finding the right moment to intervene (16%) are identified as key difficulties.



### ADVANTAGES OF FACE-TO-FACE-MEETINGS

While respondents reported to hold and/or attend on average five face-to-face project meetings per year, they only consider three of these meetings as strictly necessary. In addition, although **64% indicated they are planning to convert a physical event into a digital event**, a majority (69%) expect fewer attendees to their digital events.

For 22%, building strong working relationships is the main advantage of face-to-face meetings, followed by the possibility to clear bottlenecks and misunderstandings (18%) and streamline the project's decision process (15%).



# **CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION**

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Survey results as well as informal discussions resulting from the survey make it possible to draw some initial conclusions on the sudden and rapid change in working practices necessitated by the COVID-19 emergency.

### 1 COVID-19 SIGNIFICANTLY IMPAIRS THE WORKFLOW OF ALL

Due to COVID-19, many events and meetings have been cancelled and the workflow had to be shifted from the offline into the online world. Despite the disruption, it is remarkable that more than half of responders said 75% of their projects can be managed remotely and almost one third believe that the entire project can be managed remotely. This gives an important indication that widespread use of relevant digital tools can ensure remote coordination of partners and alignment on management aspects.

### 2 REMOTE WORK USING OFF-THE-SHELF SOFTWARE IS THE PREDOMINANT SOLUTION STRATEGY

The use of mainstream corporate products for remote working is likely related to the fact that these platforms are well-known and already in use pre-COVID-19. The functionality is reliable, despite the fact that the data sharing is not always trusted. Open source remote working solutions may have better privacy, but are not necessarily promoted and their functionality is not well proven.

### 3 AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT AND DISTRACTION ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES DURING REMOTE MEETINGS

Holding people's attention during online meetings is a concern shared by many, and one which indicates the need for more (co)creative and interactive ways to run online meetings. A combination of tools, such as online boards, chats, video calls, messaging, collaborative drawing, etc., and techniques, such as polls, online questionnaires/surveys, gaming, AR/VR, visual contents are possible solutions.

### 4 FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS CANNOT BE 100% REPLACED

For many, face-to-face meetings clearly seem to have advantages over remote meetings. There seems to be something about face-to-face meetings that digital events cannot improve on. This fondness of meeting in-person boils down to the fact that soft skills are effective when people are together. Humans rely on their senses and even though digital means can empower and assist people, they cannot replace the more human dimensions of culture, empathy and expression.





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