



# Ad-hoc COVID-19 Survey

## Episode 1

ASTP's COVID-19 ad-hoc survey set out to better understand the pandemic's impact on the knowledge transfer (KT) community. Between July and September 2020, data was gathered from 252 respondents on the challenges faced by European KT offices, the new practices of KT professionals, and how ASTP can provide further support to its members and the KT community.

Respondents from 31 countries, 26 within and 5 beyond Europe, participated in the survey. 65% were ASTP members at the time and 42% had been working as a KTO professional for 10 years or more.

The insights from this rich dataset will be shared with the KT community and the larger public over the course of consecutive 'episodes' in the summer of 2021.

Feedback is very welcome. Contact us at [survey@astp4kt.eu](mailto:survey@astp4kt.eu)



# Key Insights

## Current Situation

**90%** reported a change in their work at the KTO

## Impact

**71%** of respondents indicated that their KTO has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic

**84%** delay in project implementations and contract negotiations

**56%** new opportunities mainly related to COVID-19

## Challenges

- KT professionals faced difficulties to interact with and get investment from industry KTOs
- KT professionals struggled to maintain activities running, as well as digitalisation, networking, and working remotely from home

## Relationships

**50%** reported relationships with their existing industrial partners have not been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic

**35%** reported negative impact on their relationships with companies

**11%** reported relationships with industrial partners have been improved by pandemic

# Current Situation

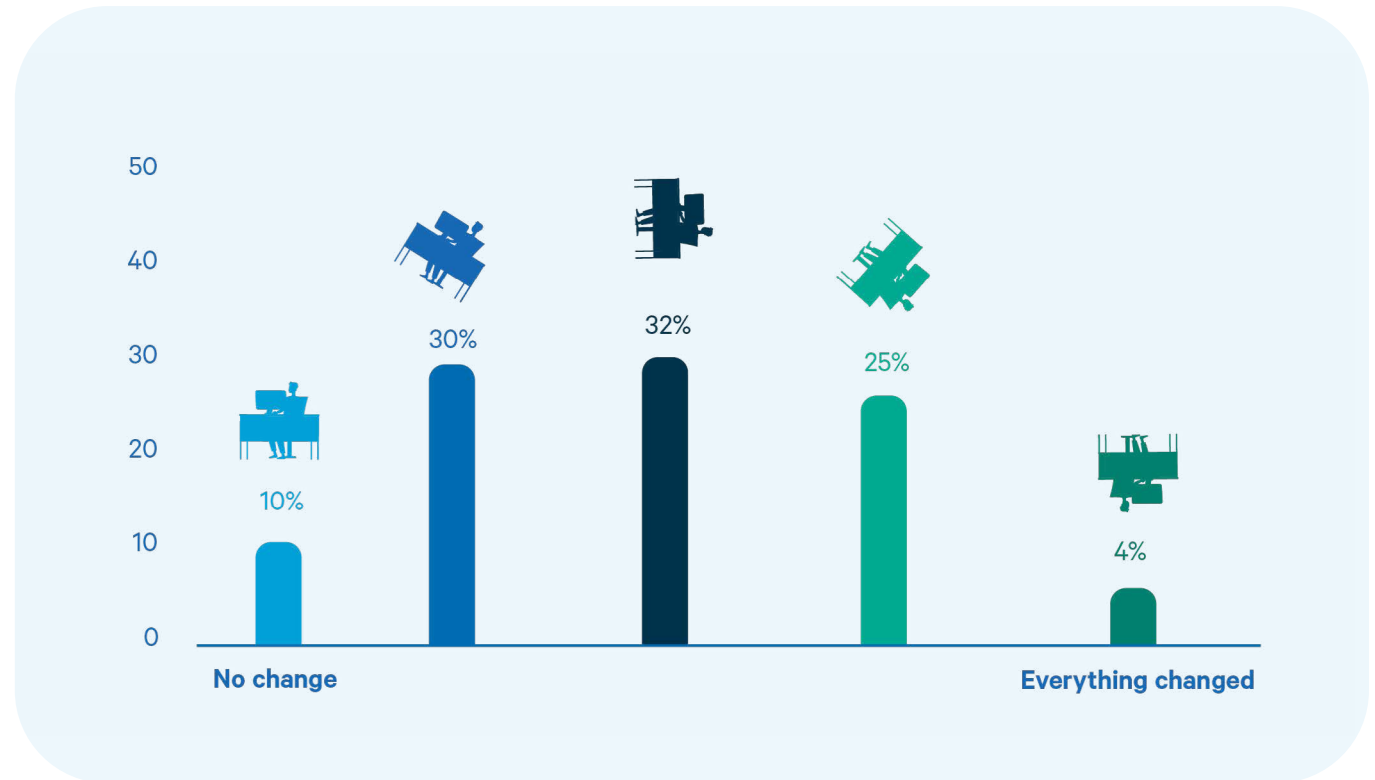
## How much has your work in the KTO changed since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic?

The aim of this question was to assess the current situation of the KT profession in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Respondents ranked the degree of change on a scale from 1 - 5 (1 = “no change” and 5 = “all activities changed”).

The **vast majority** of the 252 respondents (90%) reported a **change in their activity** as the graphic shows. This distribution was published by ASTP in an initial [infographic](#) on December 1<sup>st</sup> 2020.

On the extremes, 10% of respondents (24 KT professionals) reported **no change** in their work and 4% (9 KT professionals) reported that **everything had changed** since the beginning of



the pandemic. Notable was that answers for both categories came from Belgium, Italy, Germany and Spain.

KT professionals reporting no change also came from: Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Taiwan and the United Kingdom. KT professionals for whom all activities changed due to the pandemic came from Poland and Turkey.

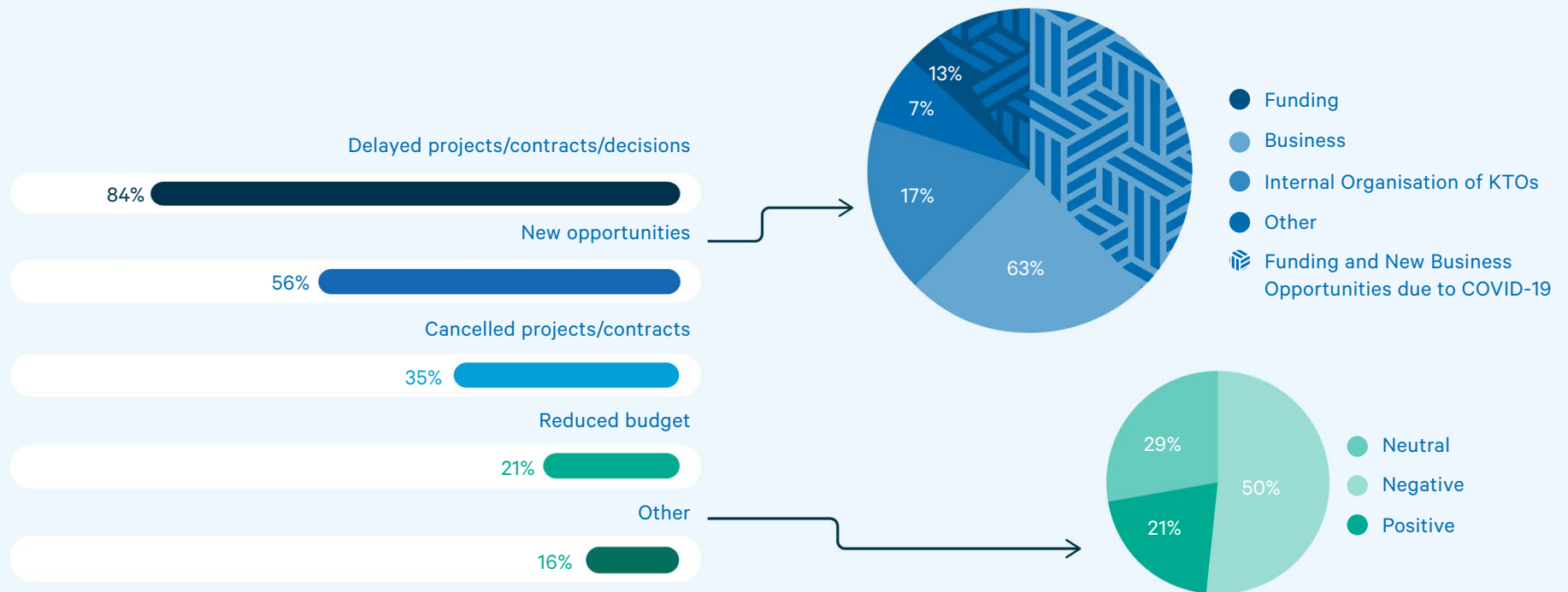
Of the KT professionals that stated COVID-19 did not change their work, 15 stated that COVID-19 had no impact on the KTO. Of the KT professionals for whom all activities changed, 7 indicated that COVID-19 had an impact on the KTO.

# Impact

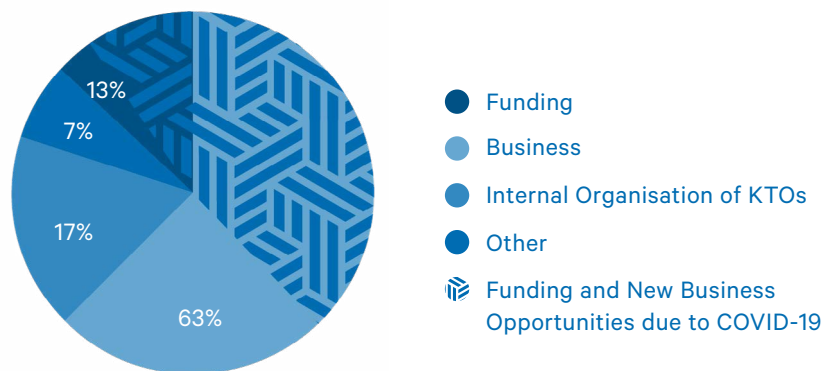
71% of respondents (178/252) indicated that their KTOs' activities have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic whereas for 18% this was not the case. 11% of respondents did not know if it had an impact on their KTO.

## Areas impacted by the COVID-19

The most recurrent (and expected) consequence has been a delay in project implementation and contract negotiations (84%). Other than delays in projects, the respondents highlighted a total cancellation of projects and contracts (35%) and the reduction of budget (21%).



## New Opportunities



It is surprising that, despite the situation, more than half of respondents reported that new opportunities were coming their way (56%). The 99 respondents identified **115 new opportunities**, these referred to funding (13%) and business opportunities (63%), of which more than half (49/87) are COVID-19-related funding and business opportunities.

An opportunity that clearly emerged from the responses and comments to the survey is the push to health-related technologies and the opportunities resulting from the pandemic in terms of new research projects.

*“Knowledge transfer on COVID-19 research and e-learning technologies” | “Chance to apply existing research to COVID-19 challenges and secure Government resilience funding”*

The pandemic has paved the way not only for new research projects but also for new **business opportunities** for KTOs.

*“...medical devices such as masks...” | “...contracts related to COVID-19...” | “...COVID Proof of Concept...” | “...hackathons on COVID-19...” | “...loads of COVID-19 work, such as vaccines, diagnostics, big data, ventilator design, consultancies...”*

Also new opportunities for the **internal organisation of KTOs** emerged (17% of the identified opportunities). In addition to digitalisation, new ways of organisation, increased efficiency and productivity, were appreciated dimensions reported by the respondents.

*“...optimisation of document circulation and order fulfilment procedures...” | “We have re-evaluated our work processes” | “...greater efficiency and less costs produced...” | “...changes in corporate culture of work...”*

Certainly, the impact on the organisational aspect of KTOs have been also perceived as a challenge by many respondents, as depicted in the following.

Virtual activities have been considered a positive change in several scopes of KT work, such as business or the digitalisation of the internal activities as well as the online events. Looking at new digital solutions for workshops. This seems to suggest that the digital transition was something KT professionals have been waiting for.

*“Increased use of online platforms to reach out to stakeholders and partners” | “Better online communication internally” | “Development of remote work, changes in corporate culture of work”*

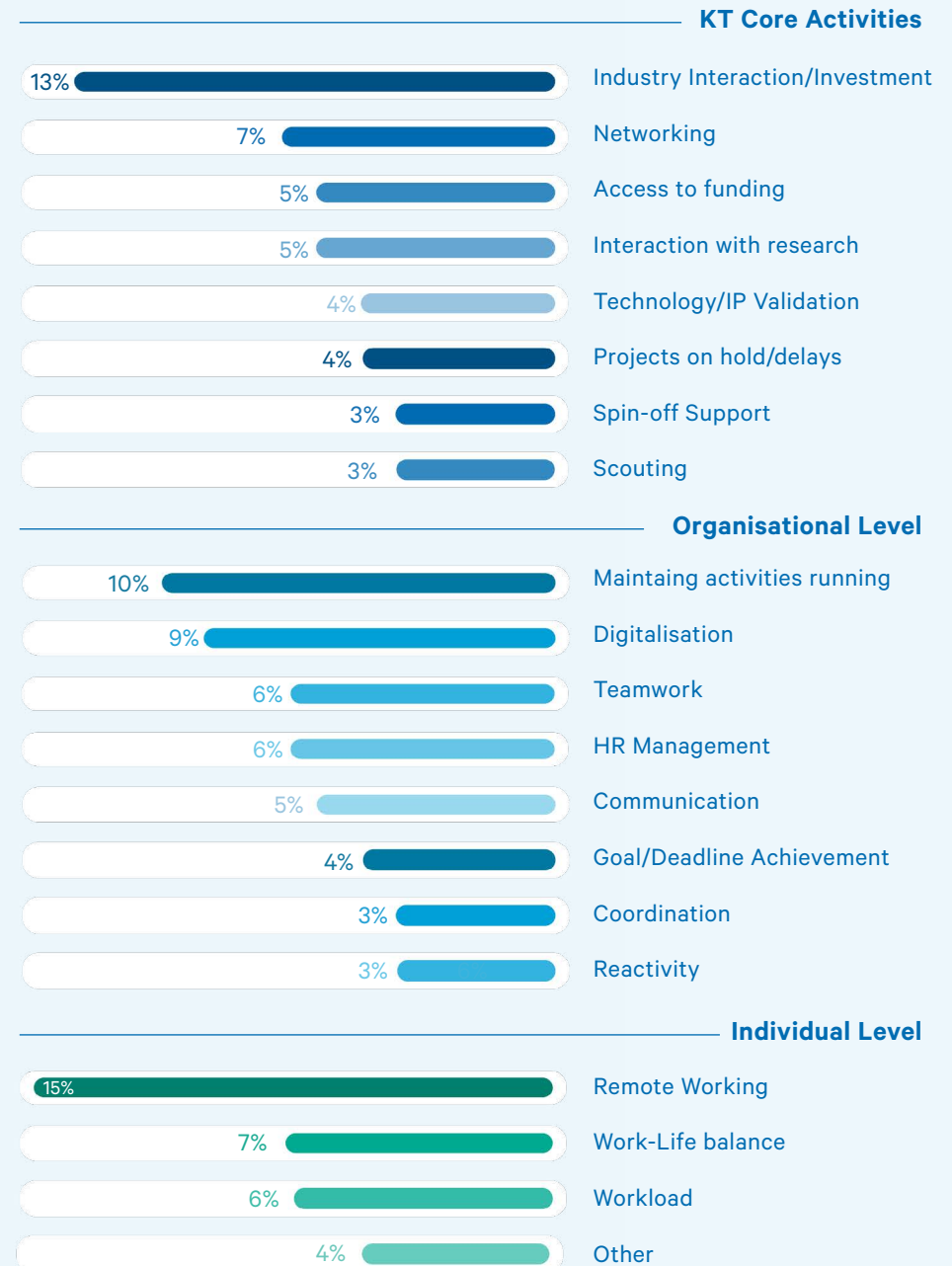
# Challenges

## *What is the largest challenge that you have been facing in your job since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic?*

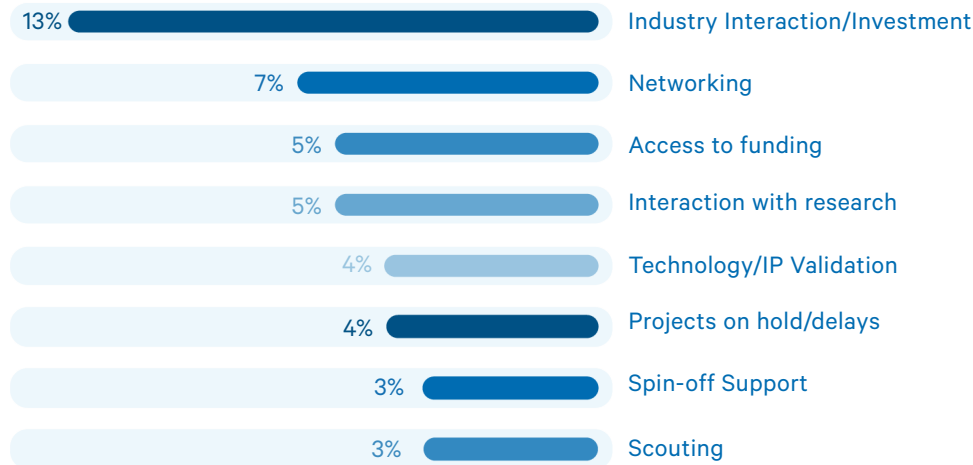
This question aimed to understand the areas of work which were particularly challenging during this period. 95% of the respondents (239/252) were concerned by challenges in three main groups:

1. KT Core Activities
2. Organisational Level
3. Individual Level

In each group, the responses were further subdivided into distinct categories, as shown in the figure alongside. Some comments referred to different challenges and were thus allocated to multiple categories.



## Challenges within KT Core Activities



When it comes to KT core activities, the major challenges were a direct consequence of both the lockdown, that hindered social and business interactions, and the changes to investment behaviour in industry by either reducing or refocusing. 13% of respondents identified **Industry Interaction** and/or **Investment** as a challenge.

*“It is hard to convince companies to spare funding for R&D or licensing activities during the crisis” | “Everything goes much slower than usual, companies have other priorities than to invest in a collaborative work with a research organisation, even if their availability for a first phone conference is still there”*

7% have indicated that **Networking** was challenging.

*“Building trust is easier when we meet physically” | “Less face-to-face meetings diminish personal involvement and practically reduces the networking possibilities to almost zero”*

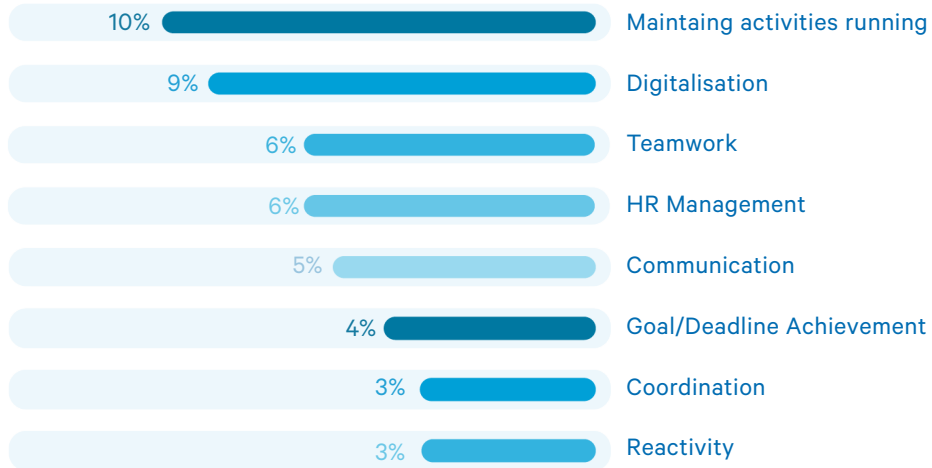
The lockdown also had consequences on the **interaction with researchers** (5%) and in the advancement of several projects (**Projects on hold/delays**, 4%), specifically those related to proof-of-concept (**Technology/ IP Validation**, 4%), sometimes due to restricted access to laboratory facilities.

*“As the research labs and university are closed all projects are on hold and cannot be completed. We are still managing to get new projects in and signed however the researchers cannot access the required facilities so the work cannot be done” | “Getting hold of researchers, getting them to answer my emails and engage in our work. Now that we don’t have anymore those corridors conversation, it’s tougher to keep updated and I have to run after them”*

Finally, getting **access to funding** other than for COVID-19 related technologies was also considered a challenge by 5% of the respondents.

*“funding of non-COVID-19 projects has been more difficult” | “Project funding has also been delayed due to challenges faced by the funding agencies”*

## Challenges at the Organisational Level



The KT office as an organisation faced many challenges. 10% of the respondents reported challenges to **maintain different types of activities** at the KTO.

*“Running our university-industry matching program in a non-presential way. The same for our spin-off training and investors event programs”*

9% indicated that **digitalising operations** was a challenge.

*“Internet connection, online meetings software issues, e-signatures”*

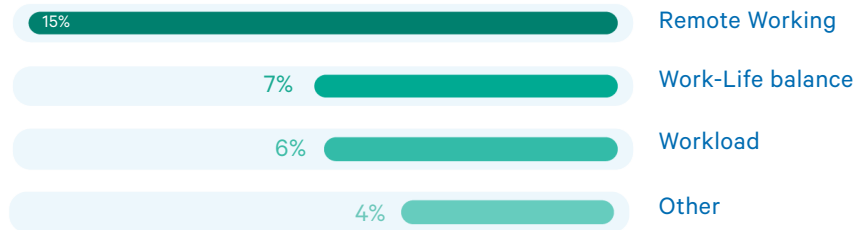
Furthermore, the pandemic affected the dynamics and performance of the KTO team in several aspects such as **Teamwork, Communication** and **HR Management**.

*“Biggest challenge is to make sure information flows at the right level to the right people, since there is no small-talk or short meetings with several people/leaders that hear the same message simultaneously” | “Integrating new team members, measuring team motivation, lacking benefits of physical team synergy and coincidental opportunities among our modules” | “Managing a team by distance, remaining a team, instead of being an addition of individuals concentrated on their projects”*





## Challenges at the Individual Level



The challenges on an individual level were not necessarily specific to the KT profession. 15% indicated that they were struggling with **remote work**.

*“Distance work and (hence) less creativity” | “Keep the motivation staying home all the time”*

7% found it hard to maintain a **balance between work and personal life**.

*“Home schooling and taking care of kids while schools were closed next to working 100% (a lot of night shifts...) it has become more challenging to separate work from private life since home office has become the new normal”*

6% considered the **workload** in these times a challenge.

*“having to manage twice the normal workload” | “Surviving the higher intensity of the job”*

## Where were these challenges originated?

The challenges reported originated either from inside the KTO, or the outside. Examples for challenges from within KTOs are related to **Communication**, **Teamwork** and **Coordination**, and challenges from the outside **Interaction with Industry** and **Access to Funding**. Interestingly, challenges had both external and internal reasons: for example, **maintaining activities running** or even **Spin-off support**.

### Maintaining Activities Running

*“the ban on traveling abroad is the biggest obstacle, since the travels are the outputs of the projects we manage” (external) | “Running our university-industry matching program in a non-presential way. The same for our spin-off training and investors event programs” (internal)*

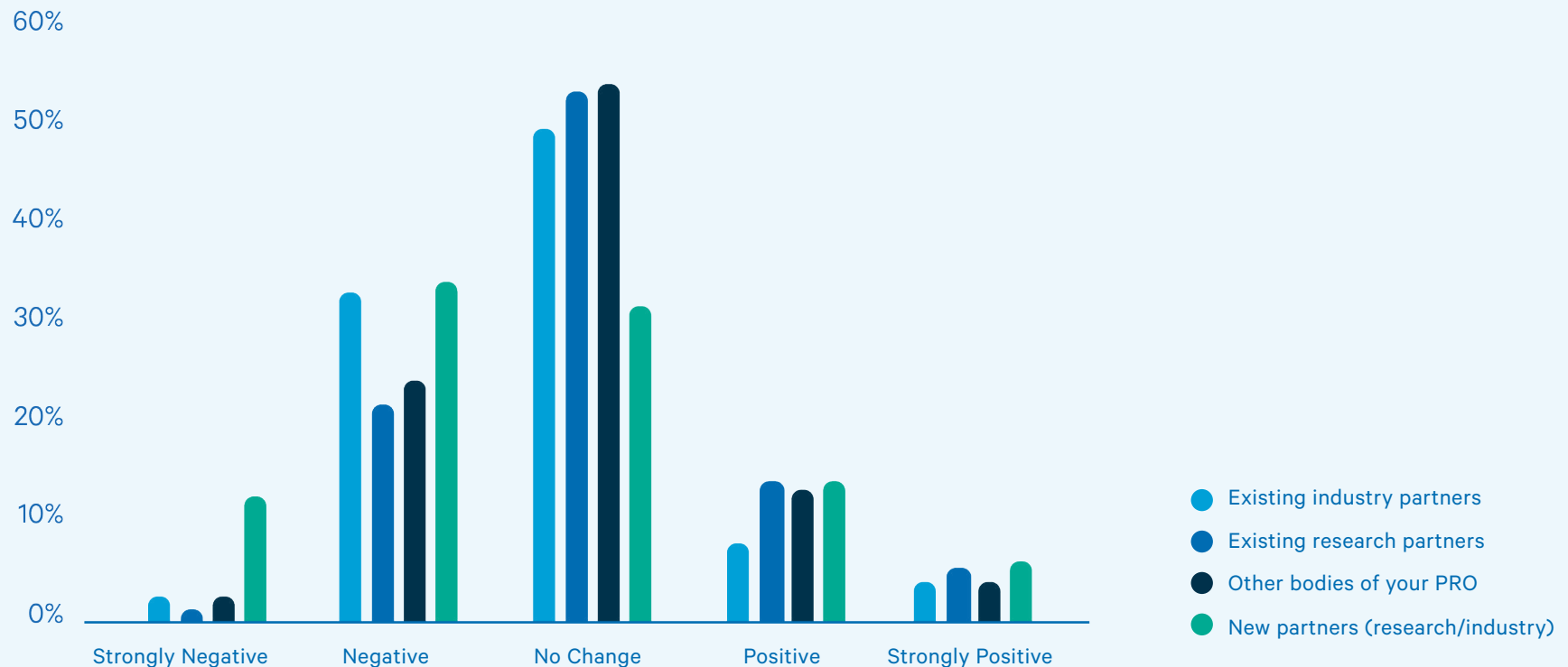
### Spin-off Support

*“it is very hard to say that the online trainings have expected effect on the progress of the entrepreneurs” (internal) | “Securing private investment support for spinout development” (external)*

# Relationships

The survey investigated the pandemic's impact on levels of engagement among KTOs and their partners. Respondents ranked the extent of change in the relationships with different types of partners on a scale from 1 - 5 (1 = "strongly negative", 3 = "no change" and 5 = "strongly positive"). In addition, comments were collected.

The analysis of the comments (63 out of 252 respondents) showed a diversity of answers. Categorising according to their overall notion showed a majority of "negative" (49%) comments. The others were "positive" (17%), "positive and negative" (17%) or "neutral" (13%).



## Change in engagement with existing industry partners

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50% of all 252 respondents indicated that relationships with their existing industrial partners have not been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

*“... In this moment no changes have been detected...” | “... no change in relationship, only in way of interacting, possibly some delay compared to normal...”*

33% of respondents experienced a negative impact with existing industrial partners, while 2% reported that these relationships have been strongly negatively affected.

*“...networking and contacting potential licensees/industry partners for collaborations at e.g. BIO conferences is more difficult...” | “... Overall, the pandemic situation had a negative impact of our relations with industrial partners - delayed performance of services contract from the university side due to the lock-down period, difficulties of payment from the industry side and also primary concerns of the industry to keep their operations running with less time for KT activities other than those directly related to COVID-19...”*

Curiously, 11% of respondents state that their industrial relationships have improved since the outbreak of the pandemic. This is mainly due to new opportunities for collaboration owing to the COVID-19 emergency.

*“...Due to the lack of travelling and business meeting, we have been very active with existing partners, but not very proactive looking for new ones...”*

*“...New entities looked for support in activities that resulted from the situation in which they found themselves during COVID-19. Taking actions together to optimise and improve the principles of joint problem solving helped a lot in building strong relationships...”*

## Change in engagement with existing research partners

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Similar results emerged regarding existing relationships with research partners: 54% of respondents do not perceive any impact, while 23% experienced a negative effect. 18% affirm that the pandemic improved relationships with their existing research partners.

*“...There is a strong feeling of ‘being in the same boat together’ among fellow research institutes/universities...”*

## Change in engagement with new partners

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In terms of new partners, 44% of respondents confirm they suffered a negative impact by the pandemic situation, 11% of which “strongly negative”, vs 20% positive and 36% neutral.

*“...because of COVID-19, activities to acquire new partners have stopped...” | “...more difficult to build a relationship (trust) if you have never seen each other in real life...” | “...hesitation of external partners in possible new undertakings...” | “...finding new partners is proving a challenge - many of my client relationship were developed through networking and events...” | “...difficult to make new business. Cannot go out, meet new business, try to make new connections. This is reduced to digital platforms in online conferences...”*



# Survey Committee Members

Ad-Hoc COVID-19 Survey



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