



# Ad-hoc COVID-19 Survey

## Episode 2

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

## What are KTOs doing more?

- supporting COVID-19-related tech transfer and new research projects targeting the virus
- digital transformation required new practices like shift of activities to online, the digitalisation of documents and of their work, as well as remote teamwork

## New practices

**79%**

of respondents and their KTOs

## Most common new activities

working from home and virtual meetings

## What are KTOs doing less?

- decrease in IP exploitation activities, with the exception of COVID-19 related technologies and projects
- networking and fewer exchanges and interactions both with the research and industrial partners

# KTO Activities

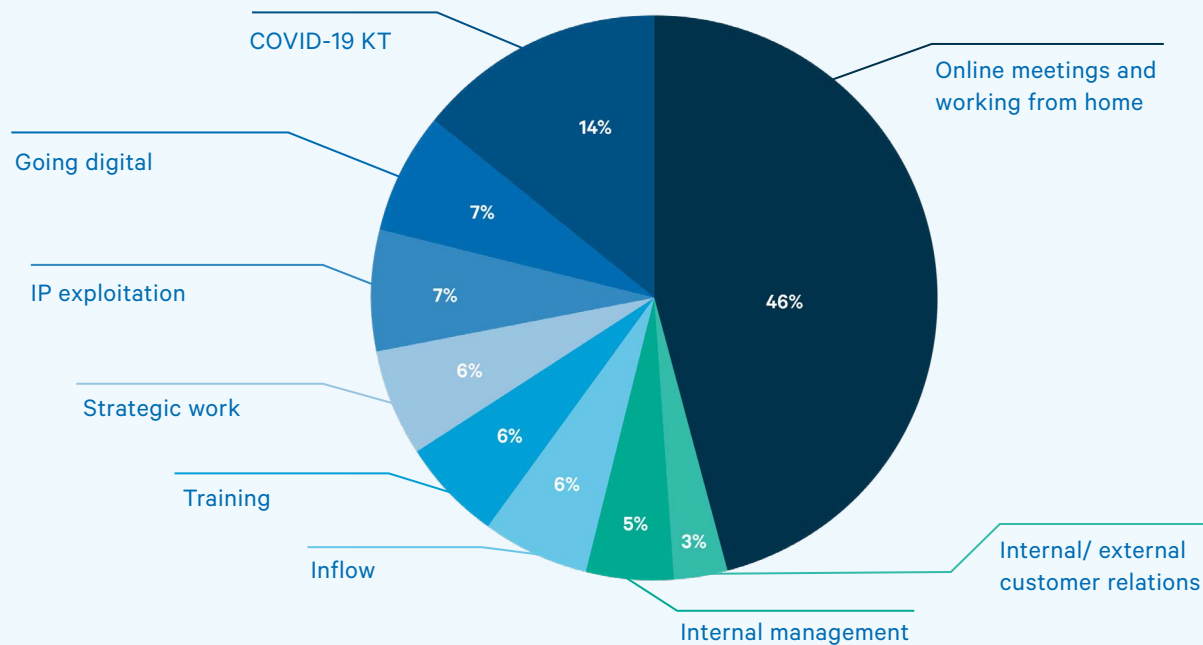
*What more are you doing and what less are you doing since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic?*

## What are KTOs doing more?

The majority of the respondents has highlighted that they have done more remote and digital activities, such as **online meetings** and **work from home** (46%). Since these consequences are transversally shared by many other sectors, the analysis focuses on the KT-specific activities impacted (or generated) by the COVID-19 pandemic.

An interesting finding from the data is that KTOs have been facing new challenges as a consequence of COVID-19 emergency (see label “**COVID-KT**” in the graph; 14%), such as negotiating research contracts or managing new inventions related to COVID-19.

*“...we have new COVID-19-related inventions...”*



Many respondents reported a shift of their usual tasks towards “health-related” projects and tasks, such as diagnostics, therapeutics, prevention, clinical trials, supporting researchers in attracting funding targeted to COVID-19 solutions or guiding SME’s in launching technologies related to the pandemic.

“...additional work with corona projects, including increased time pressures in such projects...” | “...much more work with virus / coronavirus / related technologies and methods...” | “...activities related to clinical trials, e.g. vaccines, drugs for COVID-19 plus medical devices as respirators, and workload of institutional research ethics committee highly increased...” | “...looking for calls for funding related to COVID-19 and helping our researchers about it...” | “...support to SME’s wanting to pivot technologies towards the pandemic. More joint COVID-19 funding applications...”

7% of the answers focused on the “**Going digital**” effort of KTOs. In particular related to organisational adjustments and the provision of new services.

“...more time spent on the management of my co-workers and organization of our interface with the university...” | “...trying new formats for educational programs...” | “...our KTO plans to organise an educational event, completely via online platform...”

Surprisingly, the survey data suggests that some KT offices have done more “**IP exploitation**” activities (7%) whereas others less (15%). Answers referring to the former reported contract negotiation, spin-off support, licensing, business intelligence and interaction with industry. A potential explanation

for these respondents, who reported more IP exploitation activities, could be the increase in funding initiatives related to work on COVID-19. It is not surprising that it has been attractive to tap into these new opportunities and ride the “COVID-19 wave”, so to speak.

“...more time spent on contract review than previously...” | “...we are spinning out more companies, signing more licence deals, being far more productive...” | “...more market surveillance and market research...”

Another group of questions concerned the early stages of the knowledge transfer process “**inflow**” (6%), such as scouting or sensibilisation.

“...more invention disclosures...” | “...approaching scientists and inventors by telephone more, in order to establish contact, stimulate innovation and promote corona-related funding...”

In addition, **training** and **strategic work** (both 6%) have been done more at some KTOs. The latter concerns strategic activities such as the preparation for the post-COVID era, adjustment to the pandemic situation or risk mitigation.

“...started working on some structural documents and presentations...” | “...more re-planning of activities in projects, in order to strengthen the activities that can be done and to compensate for the activities that cannot be performed...” | “...additional inventory work mapping the possible damage from the delay in research projects and for our spin-offs...”

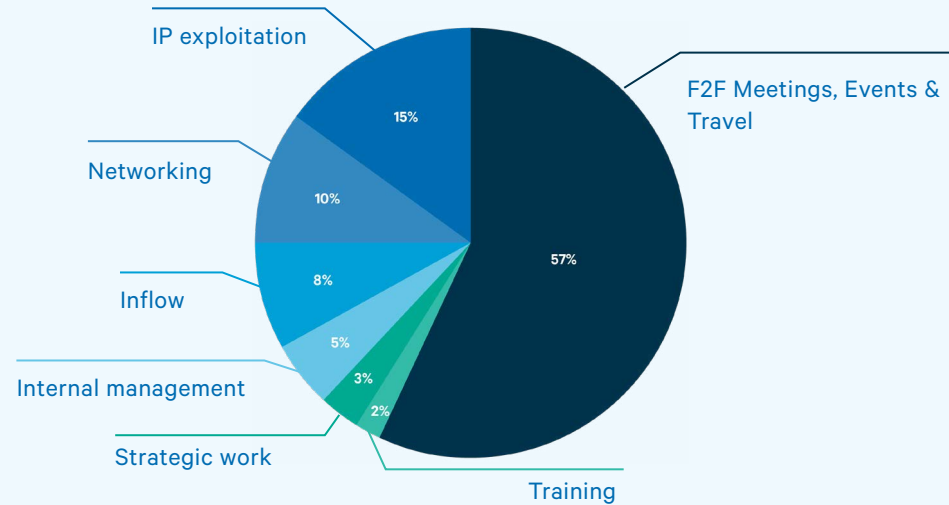
## What are KTOs doing less?

As for what they are doing less during COVID-19 pandemic, the most reoccurring answers (57%) stressed **face-to-face meetings, events and travel**. As in the previous section, the analysis focuses on KT-related activities that KT offices are doing less, noting that the most recurrent answers were not KT-specific.

15% of answers reported fewer **IP exploitation** activities like valorisation activities by KT offices, Interaction with Industry, Non-COVID-19 Tech Transfer, Business Development, Spin-out, Marketing and Negotiation delay.

*“...traditional’ KT activities - interest is still there but companies, in particular smaller ones, don’t have the capacity to engage” | “...Less licensing to new companies...”*

Another activity that has suffered the impact of COVID-19 is **networking**, both in terms of “external” networking. This is provided by KT professionals to, for example, students and researchers and “internal” networking, meaning less opportunities for getting to know people and companies in order to develop professional relationships. This aspect is strictly connected to the limits of circulation and travelling.



*“...Less awareness sessions and training sessions for the PhD...” | “...Less traveling, less networking, less companies visited or spoken with...” | “...Less network activities, such as seminars, workshops, meetings...”*

8% of the answers reported less “**inflow**” due to the pandemic situation. With the term “inflow” the analysis takes into consideration the KT activities related to invention disclosures, scouting and new projects. In particular, scouting is the activity most cited as restricted for KT professionals.

*“...receiving less invention disclosures and filing less patents as less access to researchers to drive these...”*

*“...less on active scouting and screening for new inventions...”*

**Internal management**, such as project delay and project management, and **strategic work**, such as long-term planning or brainstorming, are indicated as activities negatively impacted by COVID-19 pandemic.

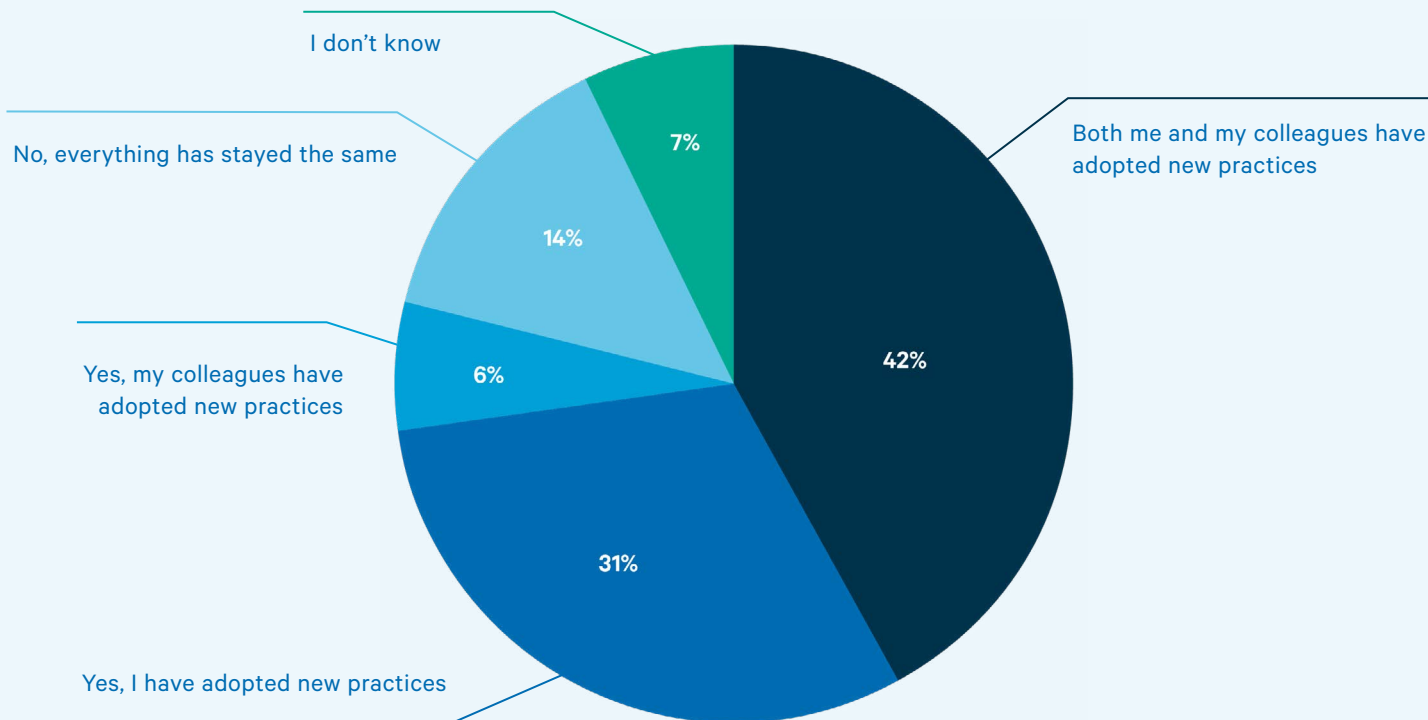
*“...almost all activities of our TTO were delayed or stopped during the COVID-19 pandemic e.g. educational events, research on Proof of Concept projects, contracting...” ; “...less on-campus TTO hosting, brainstorming with startups in incubation center...”.*

# New KTO Practices

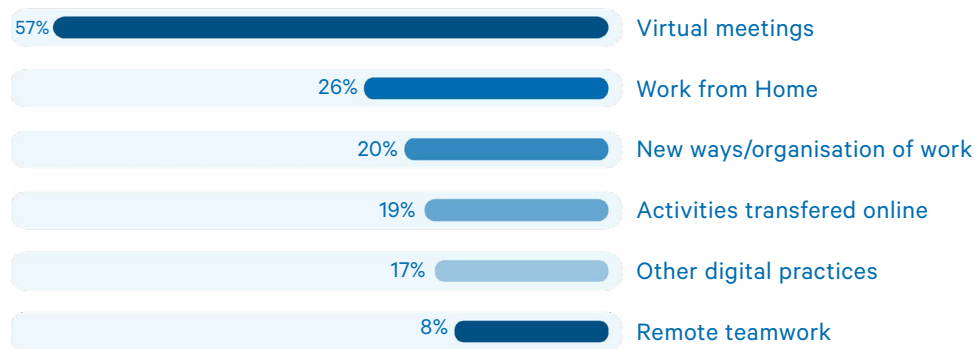
***Have you seen new practices at your KTO in light of the crisis since mid-March 2020?***

This question intended to go a step further in understanding if the KTOs adopted new practices in the pandemic context. Indeed, 79% of 252 respondents indicated the adoption of new practices at their KTO, either by themselves (31%), by their colleagues (6%) or both (42%). Only a minority (14%) stated that everything stayed the same. A few (7%) did not know if new practices were adopted.

Out of the 201 respondents who reported the adoption of new practices by either themselves or their colleagues, 74 indicated that exactly the same practices have been adopted. This means one third of the answers had been reported twice, thus the analysis focuses on the practices indicated by each respondent, without taking into account if these practices had been adopted by the respondent himself and/or by colleagues.



## New practices adopted



The analysis found many new practices that fall in over 7 categories. Consistent with Episode 1 of this series, answers that describe several new practices were labelled with more than 1 practice category and are thus accounted for in both categories.

By far the most frequently adopted practice was **virtual meetings**. 57% of the 201 respondents, that indicated new practices, reported that they replaced F2F meetings with virtual meetings. Some of the tools adopted for this activity (MSTeams, Zoom, Skype, ...) also enabled to maintain team work remotely. The second most adopted practice was **working from home** (26%) which is not surprising considering the general lockdown in most countries throughout this period. Even though it was considered a challenge, as reported in Episode 1 of this series, many respondents considered this practice an advantage.

*“Working from home and switch to virtual meetings has saved a lot of time in transportation, coordination and arrangements. Will be continued to some degree also after the pandemic.”*

Many new practices related to **new ways of working**, or of **organising work** (22% of 201 respondents).

*“regular but shorter meetings within management and working groups” | “more than one scientist involved in for example scouting sessions where it used to be 1:1” | “Our office used this ‘opportunity’ to implement the CRM system that we aquired before pandemic”*

Another set of practices reported by the respondents concerned the transfer of activities to an online setting (**activities transfered online**, 20%).

*“We started to organise our trainings, meetings and fairs online” | “We have changed the investor matchmaking event (50-70 investors and 8 cases) held every 6 months from physical to virtual” | “we started to participate in ‘visio’ business meetings (instead of going to business conferences)”*

A few reported a **change in the activities performed by the KTO** (4%), as a consequence of having to perform them online or from a funding opportunity or even from having more time to do them.

*“all our activities switched to online, we used this opportunity to organise additional bootcamps for the researchers as the labs were temporarily closed and they had ample time to participate” | “planning to do webinars/webcasts (no activities in our KTO before pandemic) | “in the context of a governmental grant we applied for” | “the saved travel time enabled better monitoring of projects”*

Different practices related to the use of digital tools were described by the respondents. The adoption of new processes to include/accept **digital signatures** of documents (8% of respondents), or **other types of digital practices** (19% of respondents).

*“I moved everything online. I do not use papers anymore. I take notes on Notes during online meetings. I use DocuSign for contracts” | “We were already working electronically for majority of working practice but COVID-19 pushed us into shifting the last bits too so now all documents are signed electronically, we have electronic invoice approval” | “getting to a less paper printing and more work with computer only (using MS Teams and OneNote for instance)” | “And there was actually no need to use any paper for printing the documents. The sudden digitalisation of our activities caused drastical decrease of the costs and the environmental impact as well as the time spent for individual tasks - and this is for sure a good practice to be remembered and continued.”*

17% of the 201 respondents that provided comments illustrated different ways to implement **remote teamwork**, or practices that allow teamwork to be effective remotely, with 5% of respondents indicating that they (or their colleagues) have started to use **new communication tools**.

*“Extensive use of Teams software to conduct meetings both internal meetings and meetings with external stakeholders. This proved to be particularly efficient [...] The use of this software proved also efficient for working on shared documents (review of contracts, drafting of reports)”*

*“Collective team meeting every Monday to check in on how staff are doing and allow them to raise any concerns/IT issues etc. Virtual coffee break scheduled across the company to encourage engagement outside of immediate teams. Each team member now submits a bullet point email covering what their activities have been during the week.”*

Finally, a few respondents have reported that they started to attend **webinars** (5%); while others indicated that their schedules and their work have seen an **increase in flexibility** (5%), which could be either positive or negative.

*“Remote working can be effective with a proper balance of physical presence in the office. People tend to do more in the same amount of time or even less” | “Some of the new practice, I consider them as bad practices because they are related to enlarge the time scheduled in order to reconciling the agendas” | “more flexible working conditions to allow employees to juggle between commitments and online meetings”*







# Survey Committee Members

Ad-Hoc COVID-19 Survey



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