

## REPORT ON MAPPING SURVEY COVID-19/HORIZON 2020

COVID-19 Emergency – Impacts on the Horizon 2020 project activities



The present survey has been performed by APRE in collaboration and synergy with the Italian H2020 NCP National Coordinator. This exercise is part of the APRE support to the MUR action to counteract effects of coronavirus emergency on H2020 projects.

Thanks to APRE staff for producing the survey and elaborating the findings in the exceptional conditions of the COVID-19 lockdown.

The NCP national coordinators





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## **INTRODUCTION**

In the context of the COVID-19 emergency, the Italian Ministry of University and Research (MUR) and the Agency for the Promotion of European Research (APRE), as Italian NCP coordinators, realised the Survey “COVID-19 Emergency – Impacts on the H2020 project activities” with the objective to identifying the main and most common critical issues encountered by the Italian coordinators during these COVID-19 months.

This action follows the letter sent by the Italian national coordinators (MUR and APRE) to the European commission at the end of March 2020. It brings up the request of support the NCPs received by the Italian R&D system with stakeholders that, under an unusual pressure, were (and partially are) not able to perform properly both in working for new applications and in current project activities.

At that time, the letter raised up the following requests:

- To postpone all the call deadlines from now to the end of April not less than one month, with the possibility to reschedule deadlines accordingly to the overall situation evolution.
- To prepare a specific set of info, FAQs, and vademecum for project coordinators, concerning the management of projects in the current emergency. NCP academy and NCP thematic networks could support with their remaining activities.
- To establish a strong and effective link between the Commission crisis group (when established) and NCP national coordinators, to allow a joint support action. The NCP national systems could be able to monitor and report to the Commission about main general problems, and, on the other side, to accelerate the dissemination of the information from the Commission to the stakeholders.

Therefore in order to set an effective dialogue with the Commission for the definition of mitigation actions more oriented and precise, the Italian coordinators were contacted for identifying the general context and the main problems generated by the current health emergency on their respective ongoing H2020 projects.

A total of 283 Italian Coordinators of ongoing H2020 projects voluntarily reply to the Survey, giving us the possibility to map and analyse a set of information on the ways the emergency condition is affecting their project activities. Furthermore, the Survey has been oriented towards the investigation of another relevant factor: the view the Italian Coordinators have about the role of Project Officers and partially of the National Contact Points in the context of the aforementioned emergency. A

detailed report about the Italian perception of the main critical issues and difficulties is represented by the present document.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The survey has been sent to the Italian coordinators active in ongoing H2020 projects. 949 coordinators and 141 beneficiaries organisations in MSCA projects received the invitation to take part in the survey. The first mailing was out the 10<sup>th</sup> of April, the second the 20<sup>th</sup> of April.

The sample has been built on the experience and the practical support of the H2020 Italian National Contact Points - NCPs. The projects invited to complete the survey have been identified with the following approach:

- By a desk analysis, merging the data available on Cordis with the dataset available in the Horizon2020 Dashboard, plus an individual search for the name/contact of the coordinator (via web search or for previous experience of the NCPs).
- By past knowledge and mailing list already owned by the NCPs.

The Survey is based on three different but complementary levels of analysis:

(A) a general part for correctly profiling the sample.

(B) a set of questions related to the proposals to understand in which ways the emergency can affect the proposals' preparation.

(C) the last part of the survey has been dedicated to the consequences on the project activities both in short and medium terms.

The survey is composed by 31 questions, mainly with multiple choice or Checkboxes question type.

The analysis is conducted examining both the whole set of answers and a selection of specific categories of respondents.

For instance, it has been carried out a double level of analysis for emphasizing peculiar behaviours of two categories of respondents:

- Collaborative projects (selecting the data available without ERC and MSCA projects)
- Projects end within 12 Months.



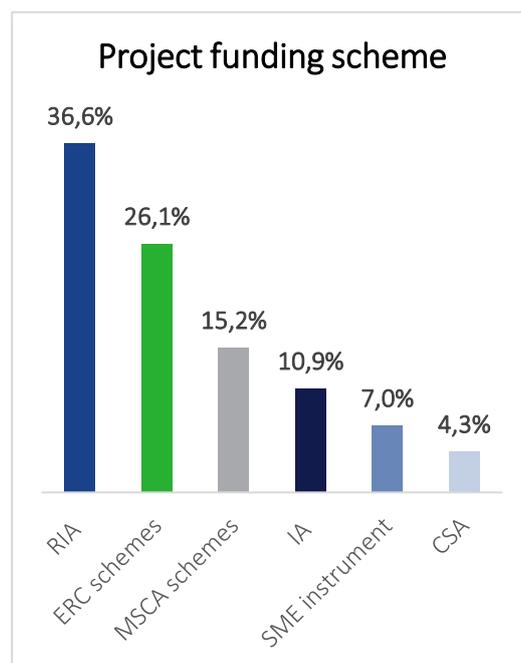
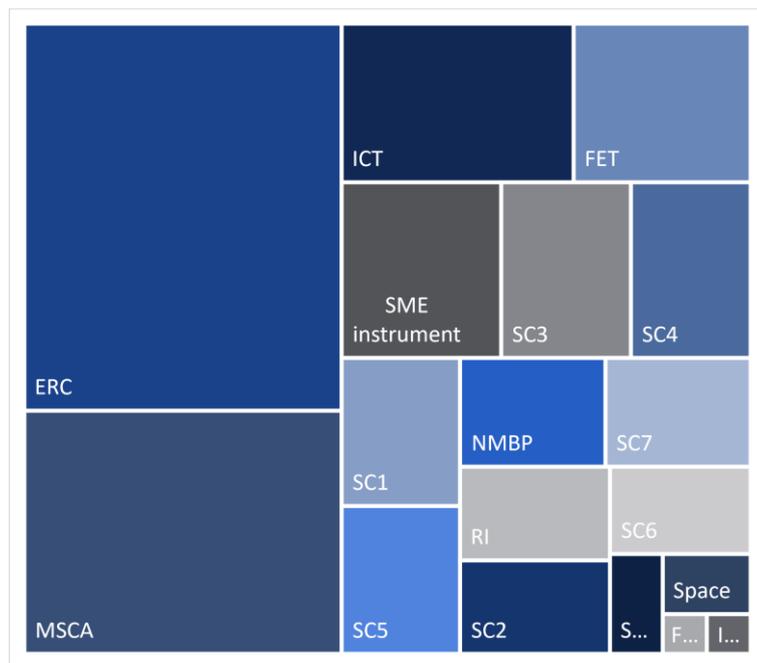
The reason behind this type of analysis is to avoid any bias due to a different management of individual projects (ERC and MSCA) and to projects with significant months to spend. If signification results are reached by the double level of exploration, it is reported in the highlights.

The “critical” analysis of the survey is detailed in the paragraph below, it includes only a selection of the entire set of questions collected for emphasising the most relevant results. The results are reported as percentage.

The complete analysis of the survey in the Annex 1.

## DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY

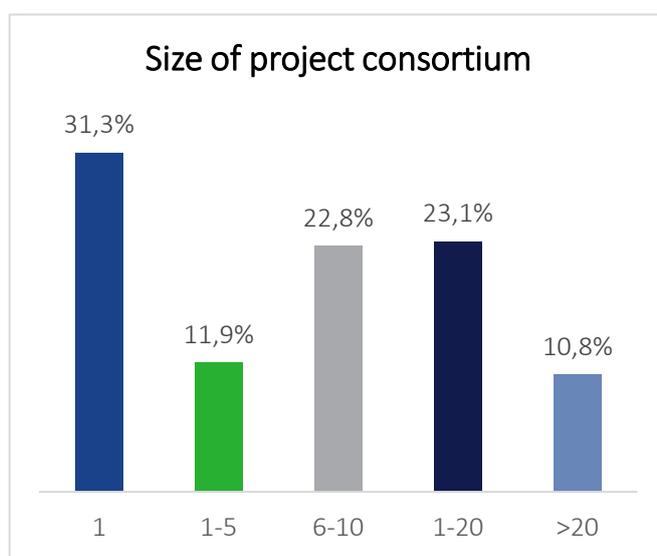
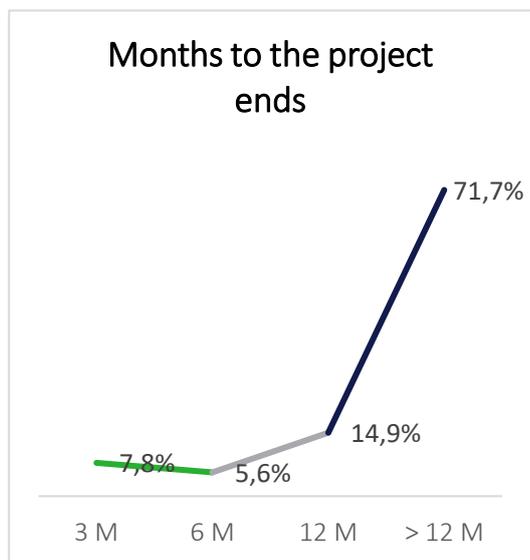
### GENERAL PART – KEY INFORMATION BY THE PROJECTS



Set of figures 1: Annex 1, Question 3 and Question 4

#### HIGHLIGHTS

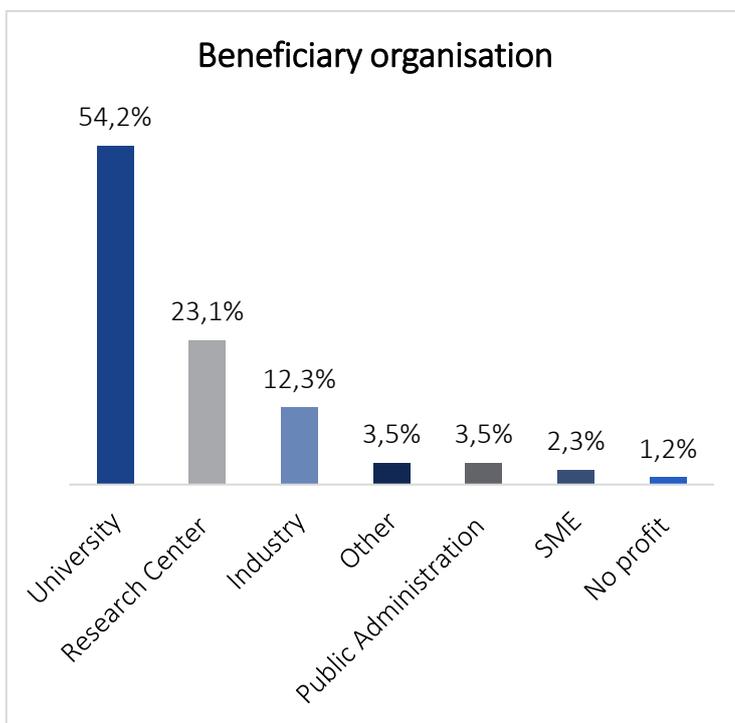
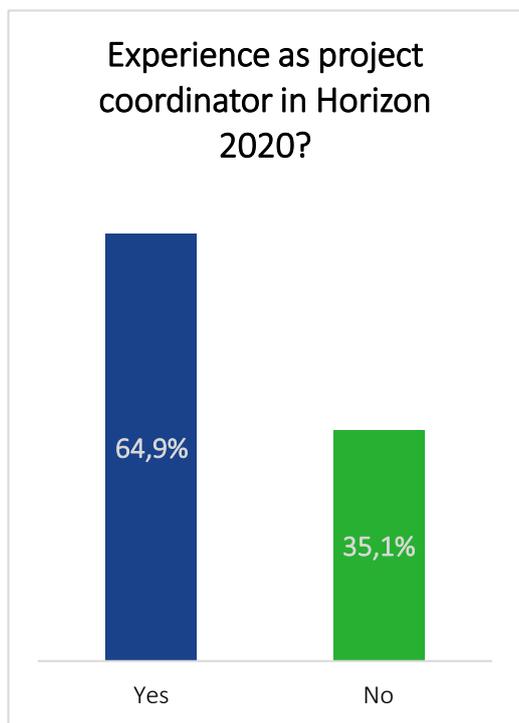
- The projects interviewed are funded mostly under ERC (26,8%) and MSCA (16,9).
- 26,4 % of the total is represented by the seven Societal Challenge.
- ICT is the “top-down approach” theme with the higher number of coordinators interviewed.
- The Research and Innovation action is the most significant funding scheme present in the survey (36,6%)



Set of figures 2: Annex 1, Question 6 and Question 7

#### HIGHLIGHTS

- Three quarters of the projects interviewed (72%) end in more than 12 M.
- 13% of the projects interviewed end by the 2020.
- Except for answers came from ERC, SME and part of the MSCA projects, the majority of the coordinators (56%) are managing consortia multi-beneficiary, with a range of partners between 6 and 20.

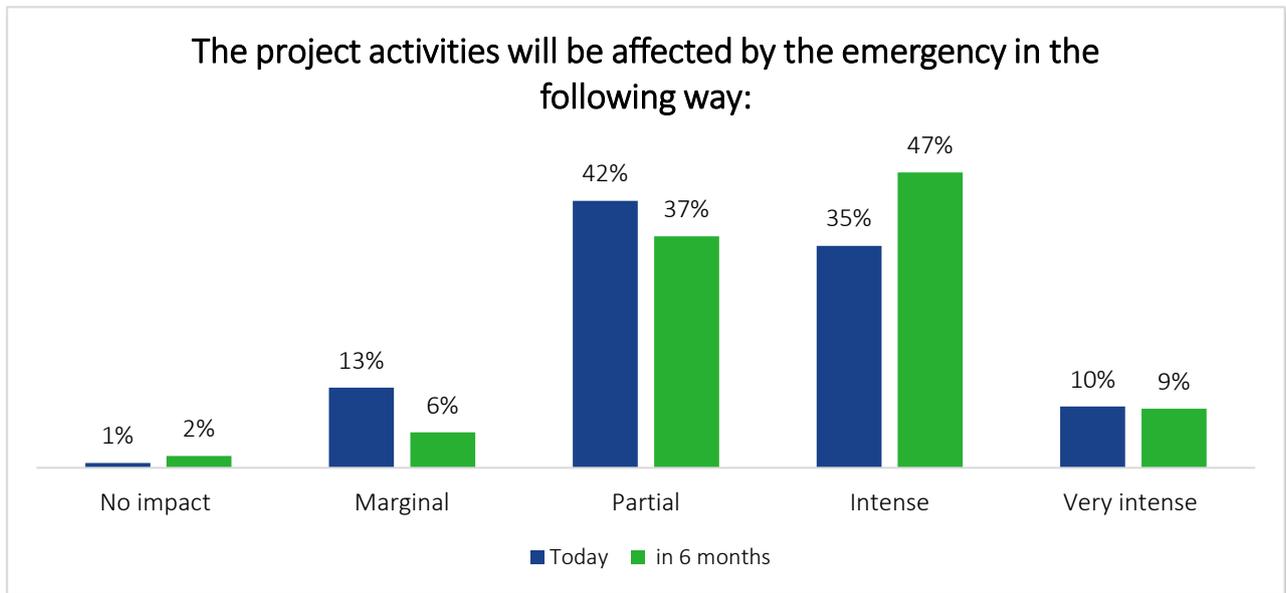


Set of figures 3: Annex 1, Question 2 and Question 5

#### HIGHLIGHTS

- Most of the respondents (65%) are coordinating their first H2020 project, most of them are PI of an ERC grants or a MSCA IF.
- Most of the coordinators come from university (54%) and Research centres (23%). The private sector is 15% of the sample.

## THE COVID 19 PERCEPTION OF THE COORDINATORS

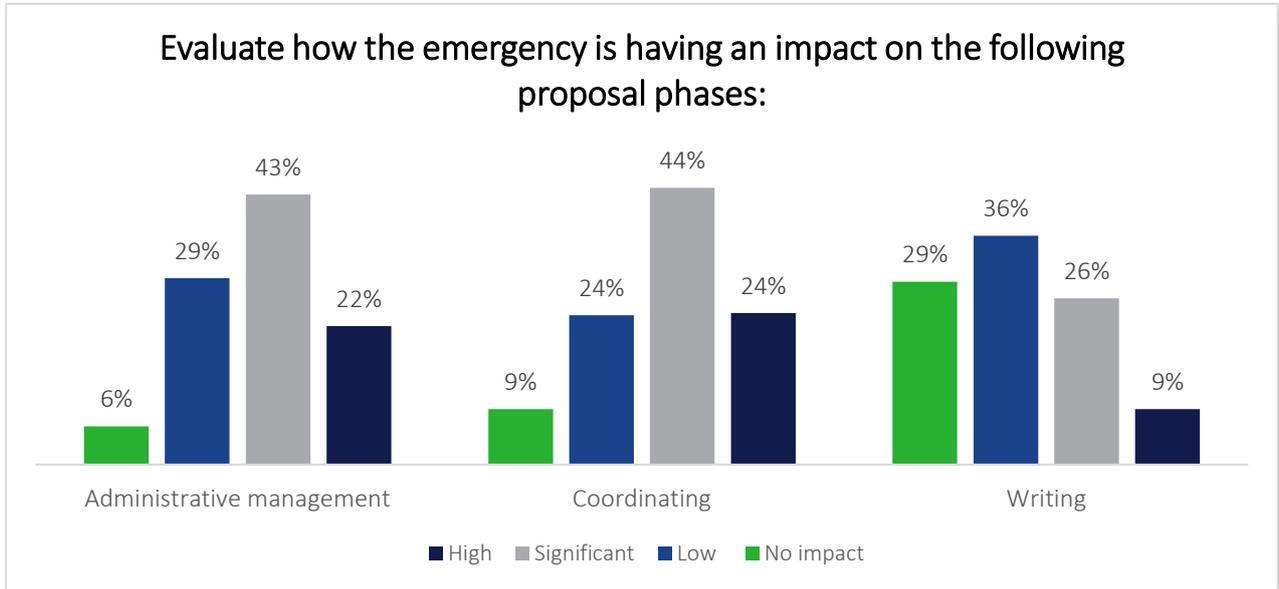


Set of figures 4: Annex 1, Question 10

**Rating system:** No impact; Marginal = No substantial effect; Partial = Recoverable effects within the lifetime of the project; Intense = need to negotiate some countermeasures with the European Commission; Very intense = entire parts of the project are at risk

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 35 % of the respondent's judges that TODAY the project activities are affected "intensely" by the emergency. This percentage rise to 47% considering a projection to 6 months.
- Almost 50% of the respondents think that they need to negotiate some countermeasures with the European Commission if the emergency will last by the end of the summer.
- The middle value is signalled by 42% of the coordinators, they consider that the current situation at T0 produce recoverable effects within the lifetime of the project.

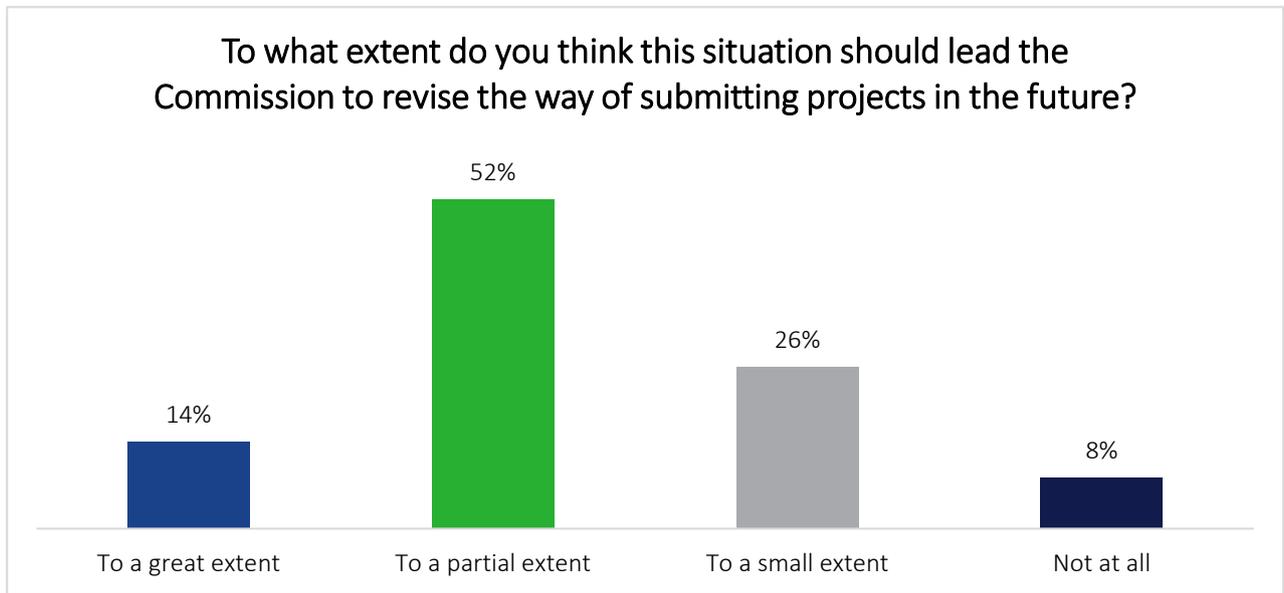


Set of figures 5: Annex 1, Question 11

#### HIGHLIGHTS

- Considering the proposal stage, most of the coordinators envisage a strong impact of the current emergency in the administrative management and coordinating phases.
- One quarter (24%) of them evaluate *high* (the upper limit value in the scale) the impact about the consortium coordination.
- The phase that is less affected by the COVID 19 consequences is the writing phase.

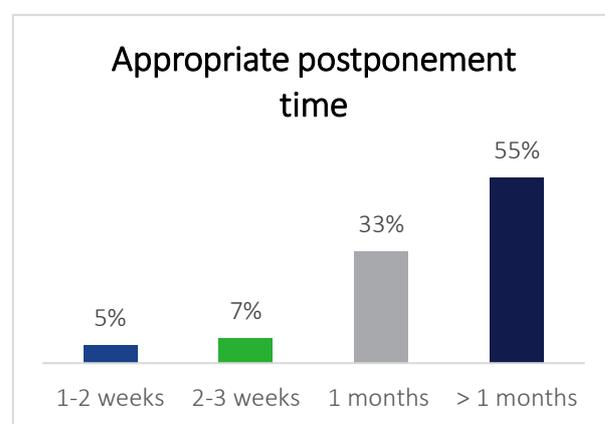
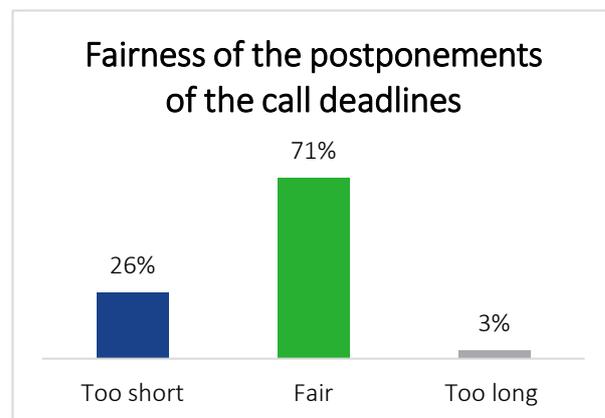
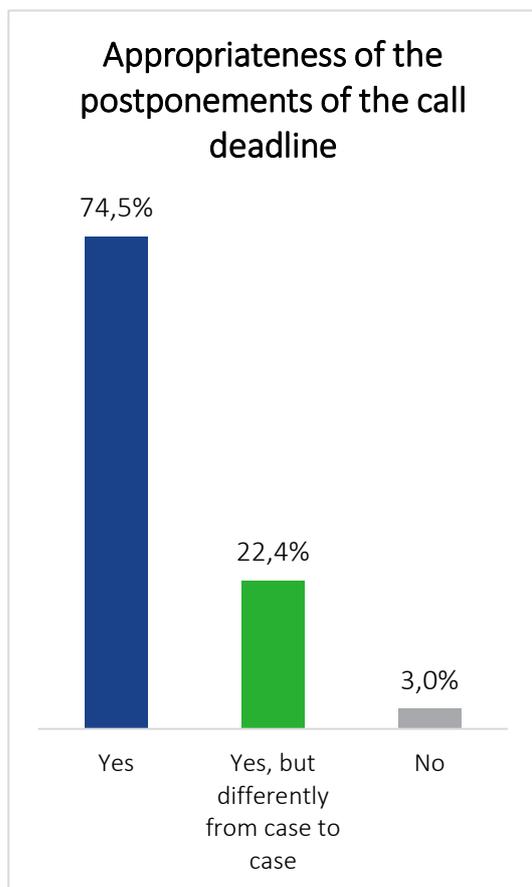
## SUBMISSION PHASE & POSTPONEMENTS



Set of figures 6: Annex 1, Question 14

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 50% of the respondents considers that the COVID 19 situation should lead the Commission to partially revised the way of submitting proposals.

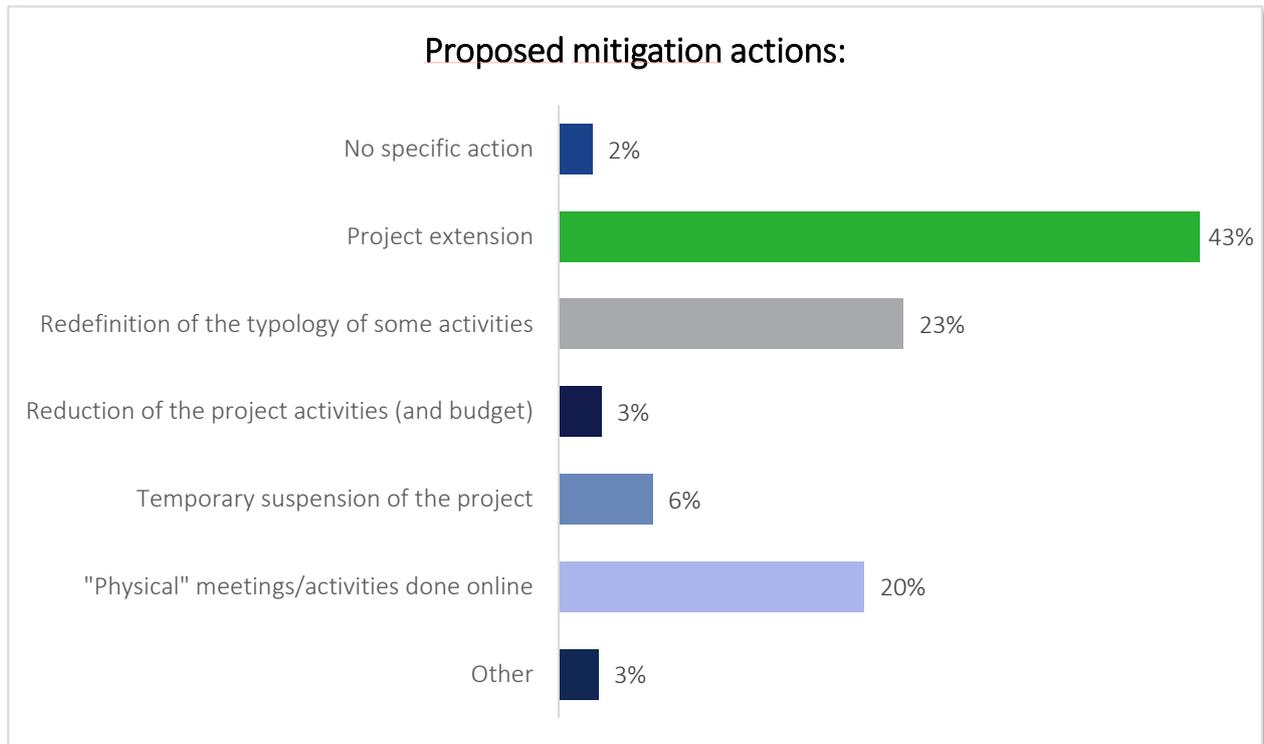


Set of figures 7: Annex 1, Question 15, Question 16 and Question 17

#### HIGHLIGHTS

- **75%** of coordinators consider the decision of the Commission to postpone most of the calls as appropriate.
- Analysing the relevance of the timing, **70%** assessed as fair the postponement time allocated. Only 26 % consider them too short.
- In any case, more than half of the coordinators believe that the appropriate postponement time for the call's deadline is more than 1 month. A timing between 1 and 3 weeks is estimate as correct only by **10 %** of the sample interviewed.

## IMPLEMENTATION PHASE



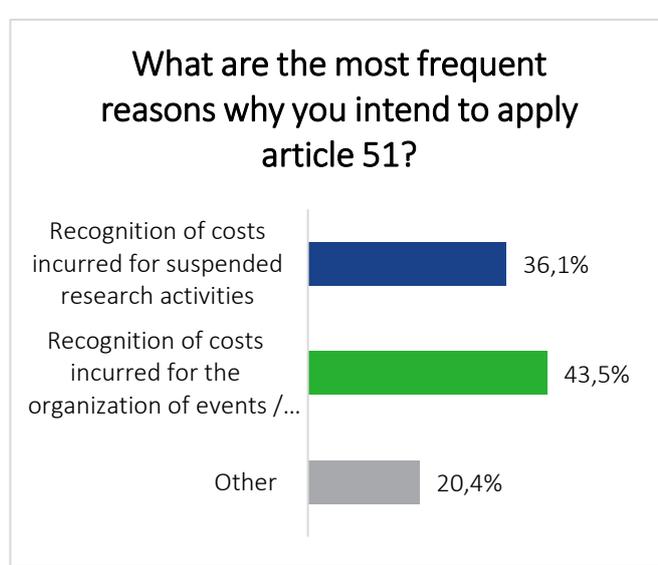
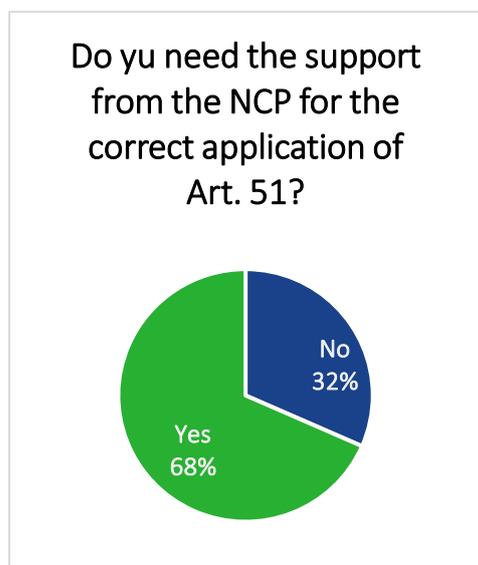
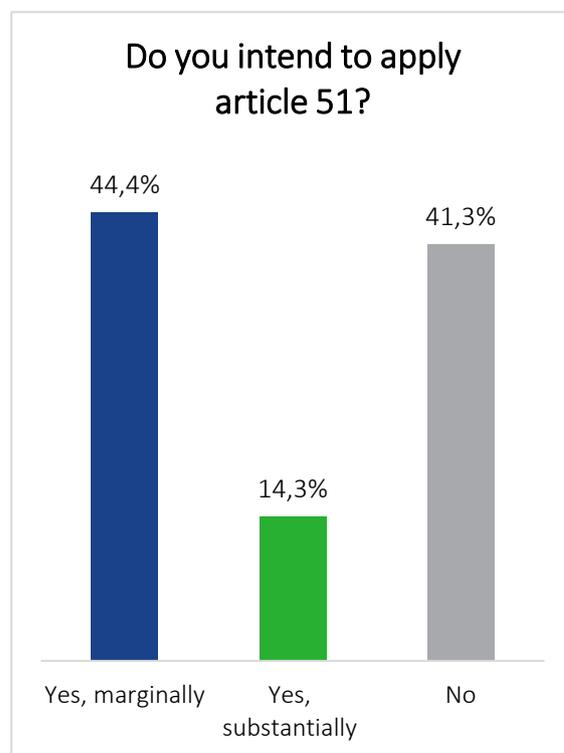
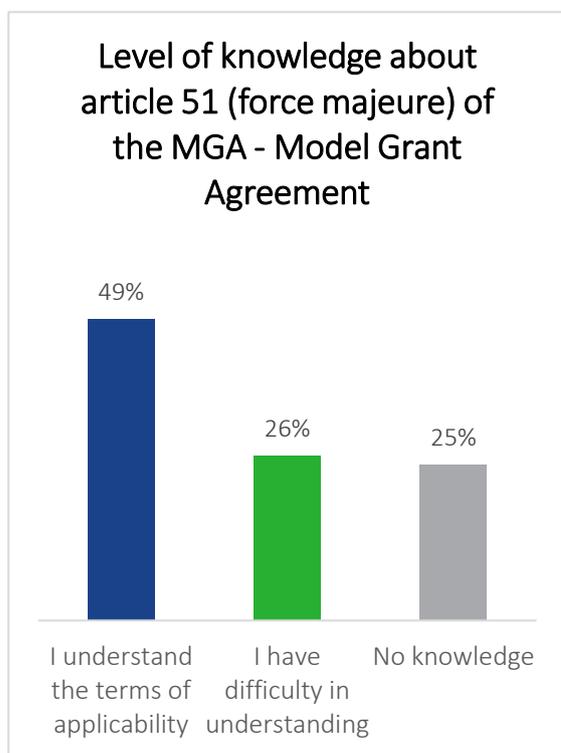
*Set of figures 8: Annex 1, Question 18*

### HIGHLIGHTS

**(multiple choice available)**

- 43% of the participants consider the project extension as the most relevant mitigation action, 23% of them judge the redefinition of the typology of some activities as immediate solution in this critical situation.
- Other mitigation action suggested are: extension for reporting timing, opportunity to shift the budget between cost categories (mainly from travel to personnel cost)

## IMPLEMENTATION PHASE – ART. 51 MGA FORCE MAJEUR

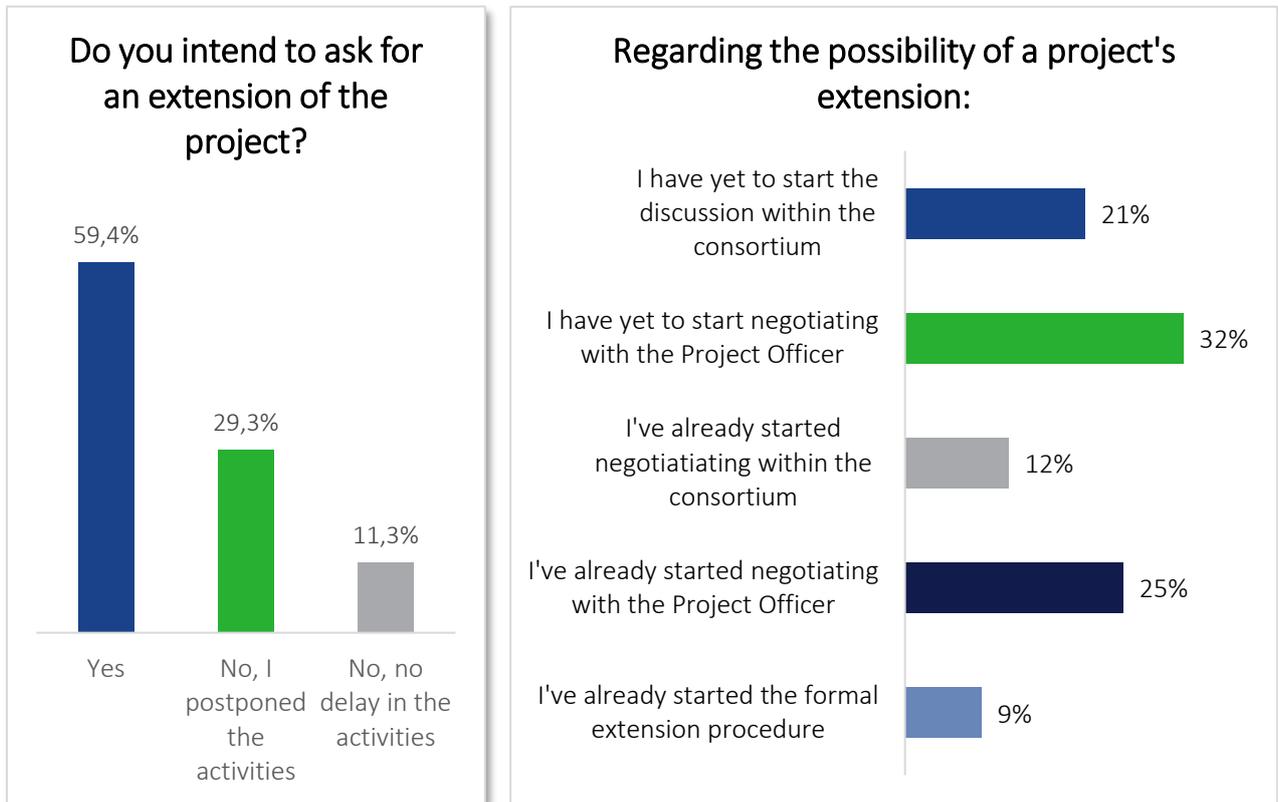


Set of figures 9: Annex 1, Question 19, Question 20, Question 21 and Question 221

## HIGHLIGHTS

- 50% of respondents said they understand the terms of applicability of the art 51 (the percentage rise to 60% without EC and MSCA coordinators); one quarter of them declared they did not know the art 51.
- Around 60% of coordinators would like to apply the art. 51 and 68% of them need the NCP support for a correct application.
- Looking at only the projects end by 12 M, the percentage of coordinators that intend to apply to Art 51 rise to 65%.
- The application of the art. 51 is for the recognition of the cost incurred for the organisation of events and meeting (43%) and for the suspension of research activities (36%). The remaining 20% collect problems related to: the mobility of researchers, testing at end users, slowdown in the purchases.

## IMPLEMENTATION PHASE – PROJECT EXTENSION

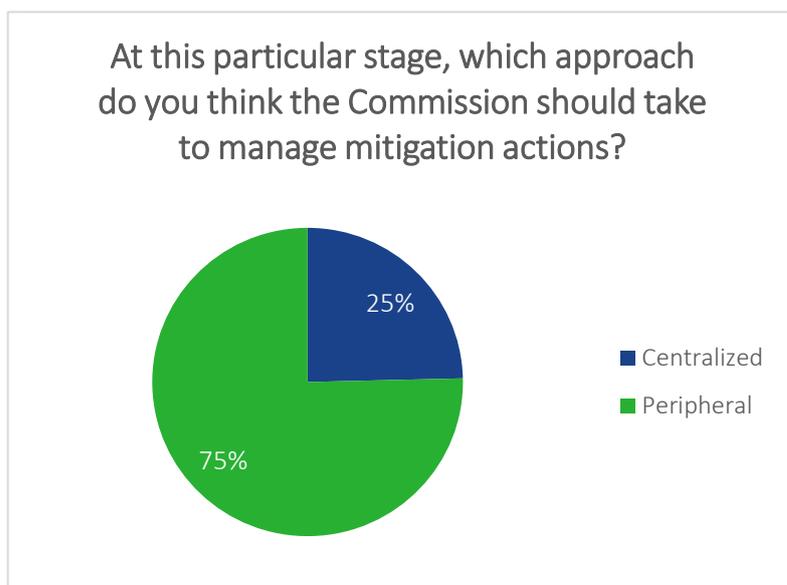
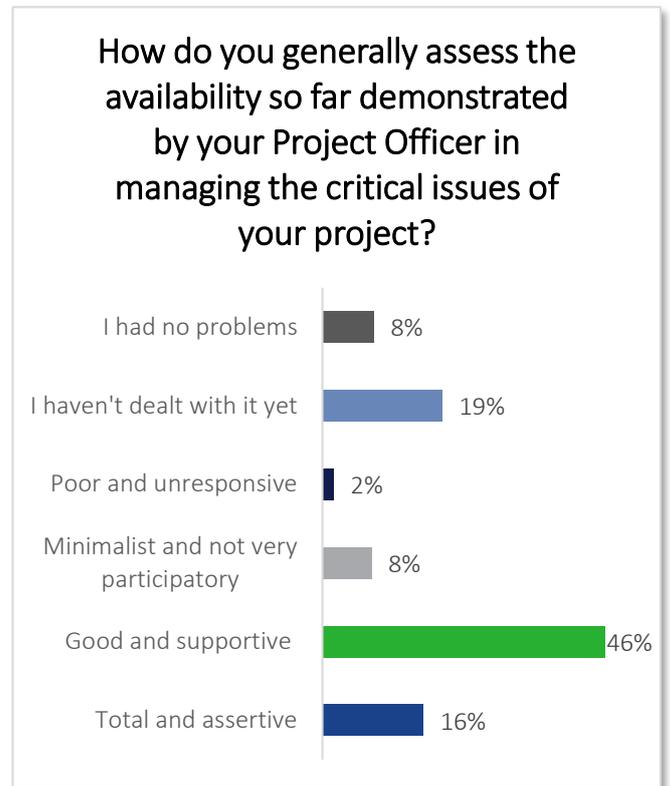
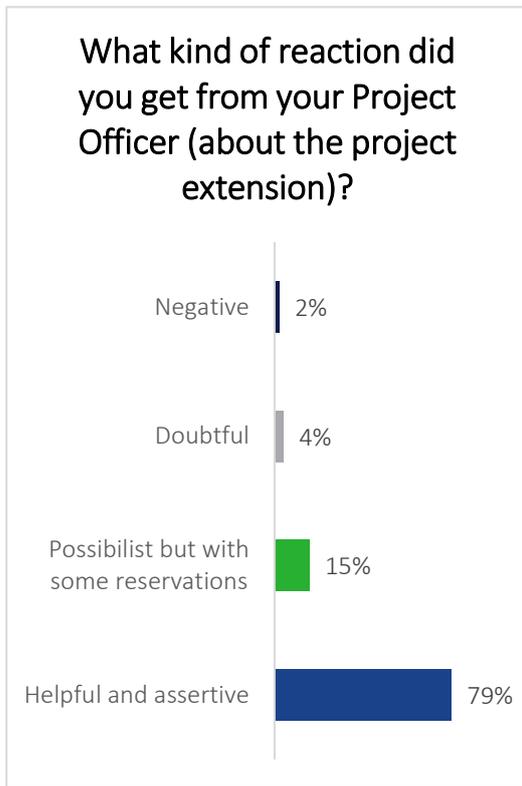


Set of figures 10: Annex 1, Question 23 and Question 24

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 60% of the coordinators declare they are going to ask for a project extension. The percentage rise to 67% if we consider only the projects end in 12 months.
- Only 11% of coordinators affirm that no delay will affect the project activities during this emergency period.
- One quarter of respondents are already negotiating the extension with the project officer. Considering only the projects end in 12 months, this percentage doubles and the 22% of the coordinators already started the formal extension procedure with the PO.

## IMPLEMENTATION PHASE – DIALOGUE WITH EC OFFICERS



*Centralized* – more or less the same solutions for all projects (one-fit-all approach)

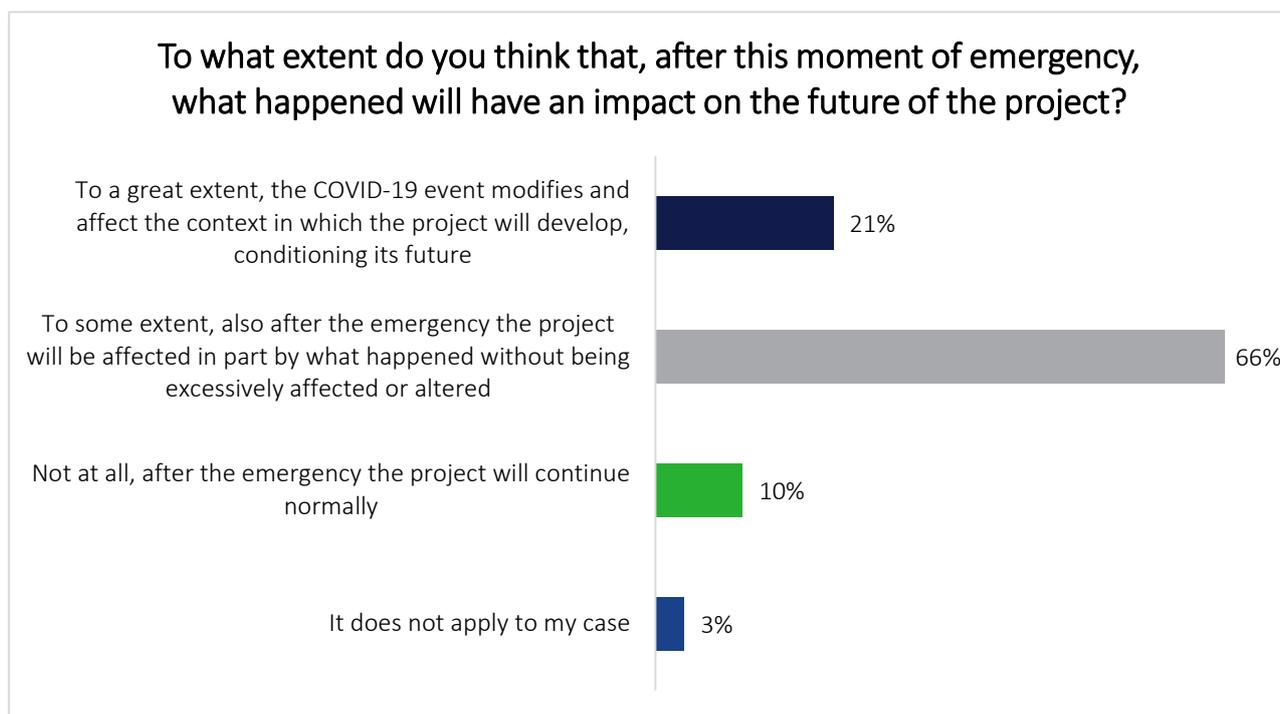
*Peripheral* – solutions adapted to the specific criticalities of each project (personalized negotiation)

Set of figures 11: Annex 1, Question 25, Question 28, Question 29

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Most of the coordinators (80%) have a positive feedback by their EC project officers linked with the project extension
- overall, only 10 % of the respondents assess as poor and minimalist the availability of their PO.
- Considering the general approach that the Commission should apply to mitigate the current situation, 75% of the interviewed seek for a peripheral approach with personalized solutions between coordinator and Commission.

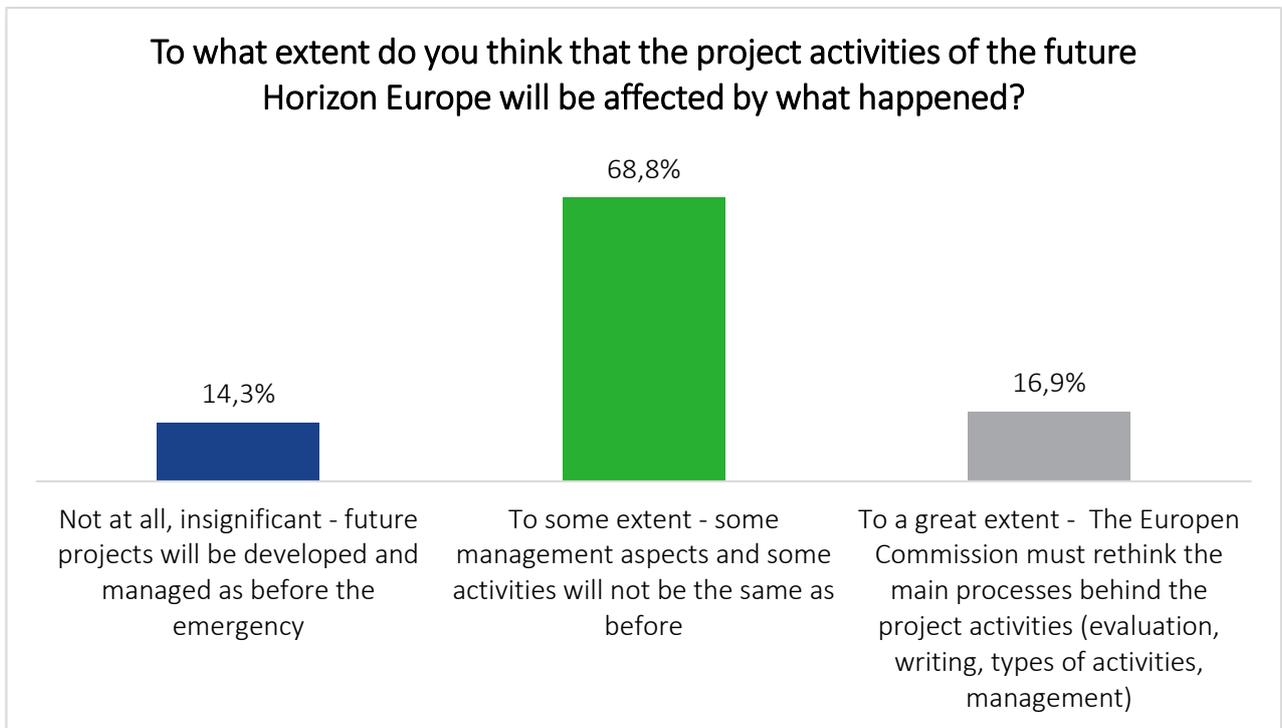
## THE COORDINATOR PROSPECTIVE TOWARD THE FUTURE OF THE PROJECT AND HORIZON EUROPE



*Set of figures 12: Annex 1, Question 30*

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 66% of coordinators declare that the emergency will partially affect the project. 20% of them affirm that COVID19 is strongly conditioning the future of their project.
- Other variation in the analysis does not alter consistently the distribution above (for programme o for project duration).



Set of figures 13: Annex 1, Question 31

#### HIGHLIGHTS

- Two-thirds of respondents suppose that Horizon Europe will be partially affected by the consequences of the current emergency, with changes in the management of the programme.
- 17% of the coordinators presume that EC must rethink the entire process of the new R&I framework.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The present survey allowed to get an evidence-based picture of the potential problems experienced by the Italian coordinators of H2020 projects during the peak of coronavirus lockdown.

**Major problems are expected on a limited number of projects**, the ones ending by December 2020 (13%), while for projects ending over the 12 months seem to have time for recovering.

As far as concern **coordinators perception**, they felt **the problems could become more critical with the time**, from *partial* (37% at present), **to severe (47% in 6 months)**. It is associated to the high level of uncertainty at the moment of survey, mid-April (reflecting the concept: *the worst is yet to come!*).

Despite the struggling request to postpone the deadlines during the lockdown period, the main preoccupation was not for the proposal submission, but rather for the management and coordination activities. However, the situation does not seem to deal with long term effect on proposal submission mechanisms in the future. In general, **the Commission reaction in postponing calls deadlines has been well considered**, providing a minimum extension of one month was granted. While **project extension remains the most frequent solution to tackle various problems**, redesign and extensive virtualisation of specific activities are considered relevant solutions too.

**The art 51, force majeure, is well known to coordinators but a proper application of the related procedures asks for the NCP support.** Critical activities for art 51 application are mainly due to costs incurred for meetings and events cancelled.

A part of the very first phase of the emergency, when Commission reaction policy to call deadlines extension request was still unclear, **the large part of the coordinators have considered excellent the Commission project officers support and assistance.**

In conclusion, through this survey and direct contacts we had with various coordinators, we highlighted a severe situation during the first phase of the emergency, with a next rapid recover and better situation control starting from mid-April. It does not mean all the problems were solved, but a more rational landscape has been established. **The establishment of a COVID-19 session in the Funding and Tender portal, and its growth and consolidation, has been a crucial step to provide a concrete support to the coordinators.**

Emergency is not over, and many long terms problems and unexpected issues are in front of us in the proper management of FP projects in this uncomfortable situation. Some of them will be recovered and managed by *usual ways*; others will require being open in rethinking the project of future. It includes redesigning the role and activities of NCP to tackle this new challenge.

## ANNEX 1

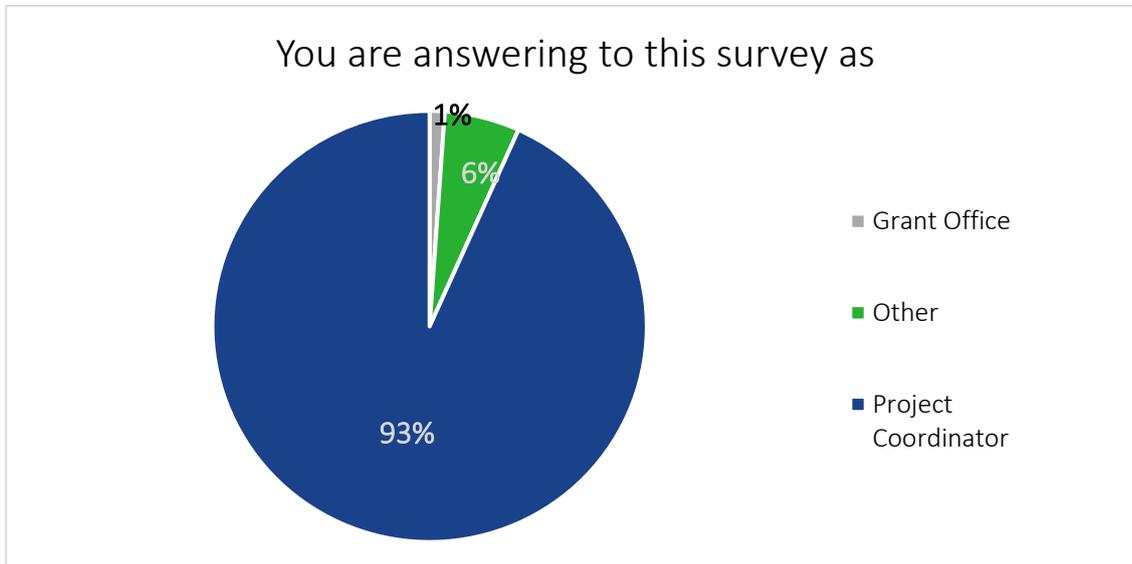


Figure 1: Q1. Role of the respondent

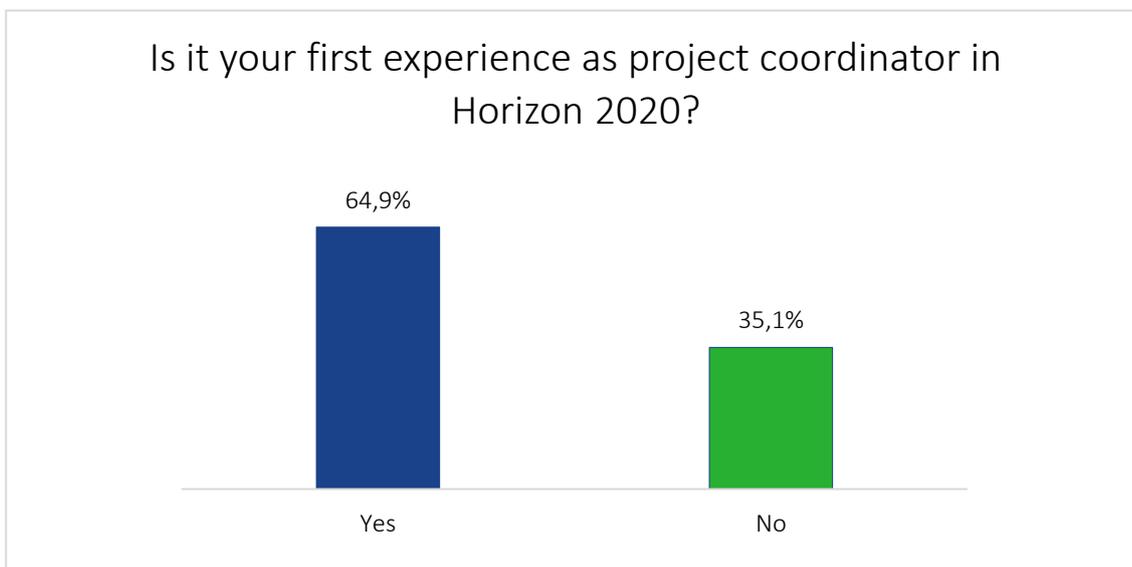


Figure 2: Q2. Respondent experience as project coordinator

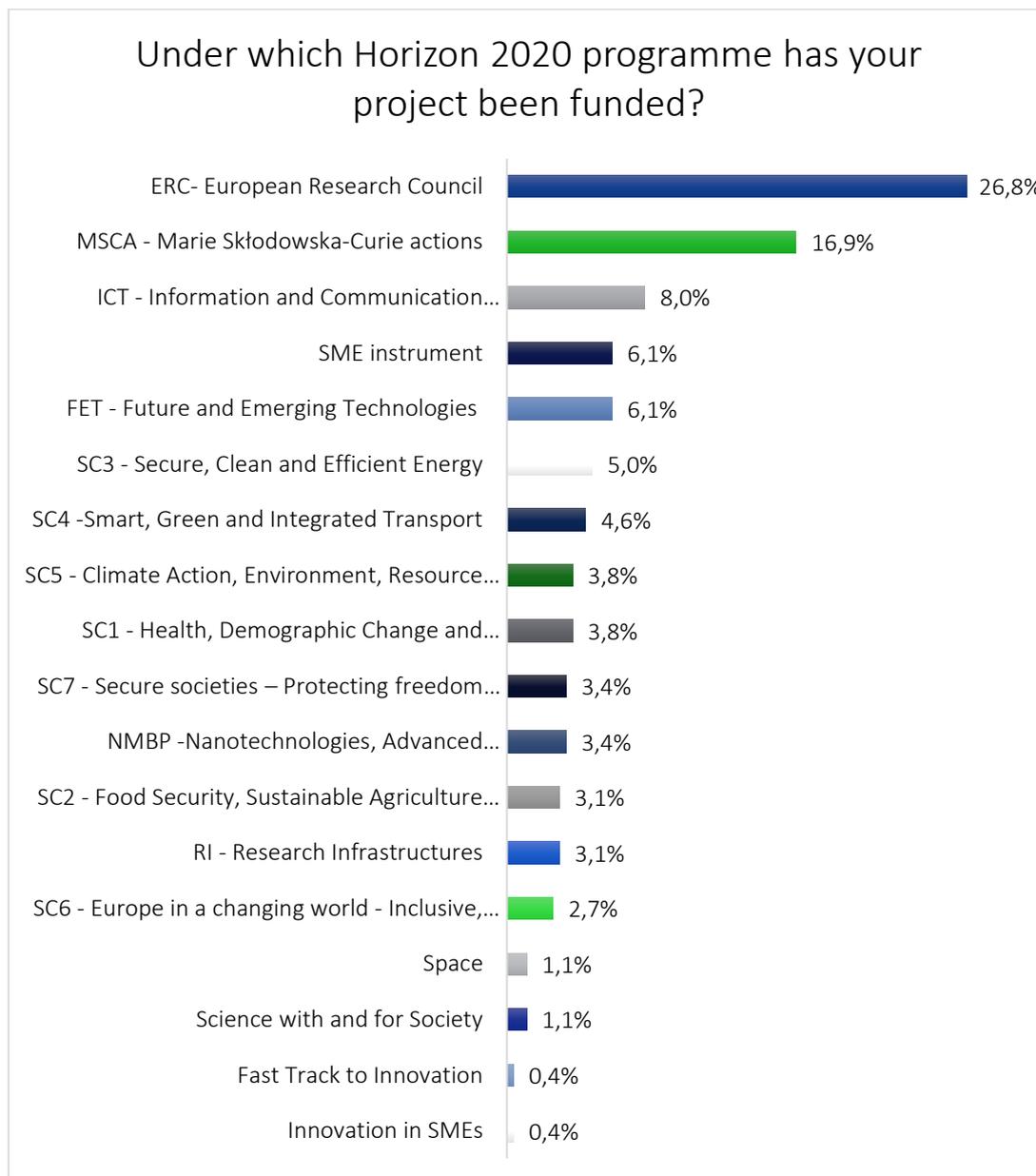


Figure 3: Q3. H2020 Programme under which the project has been funded

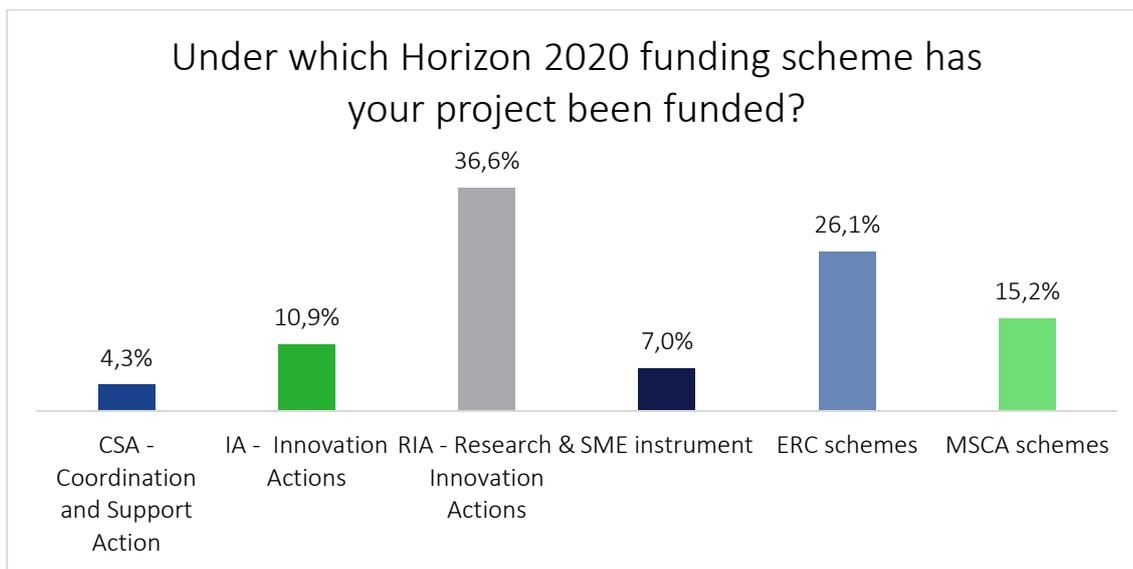


Figure 4: Q4. Funding scheme under which the project has been funded

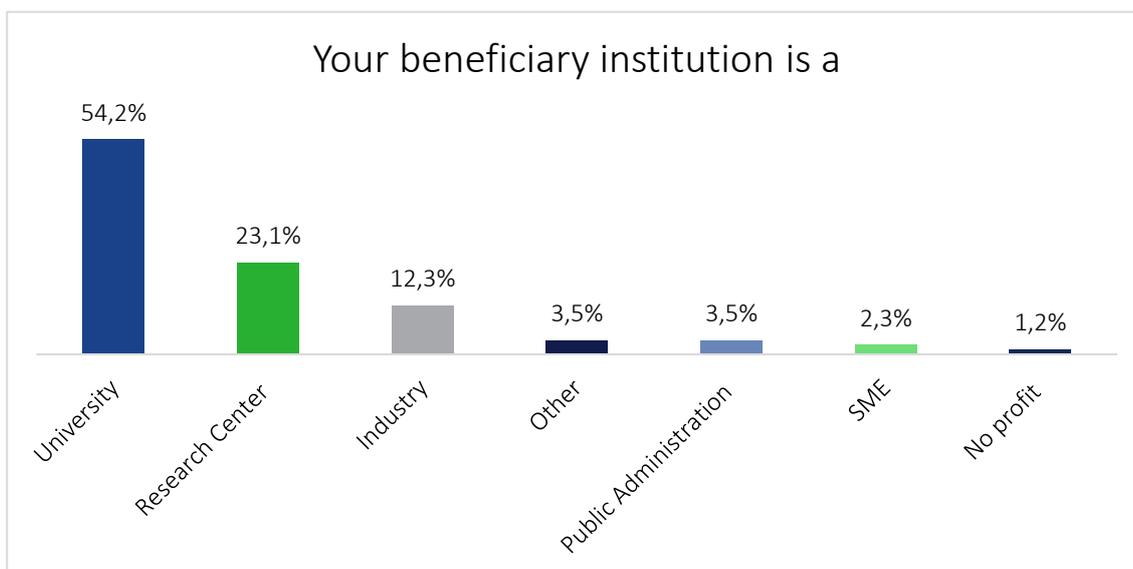


Figure 5: Q5. Respondent's beneficiary institution

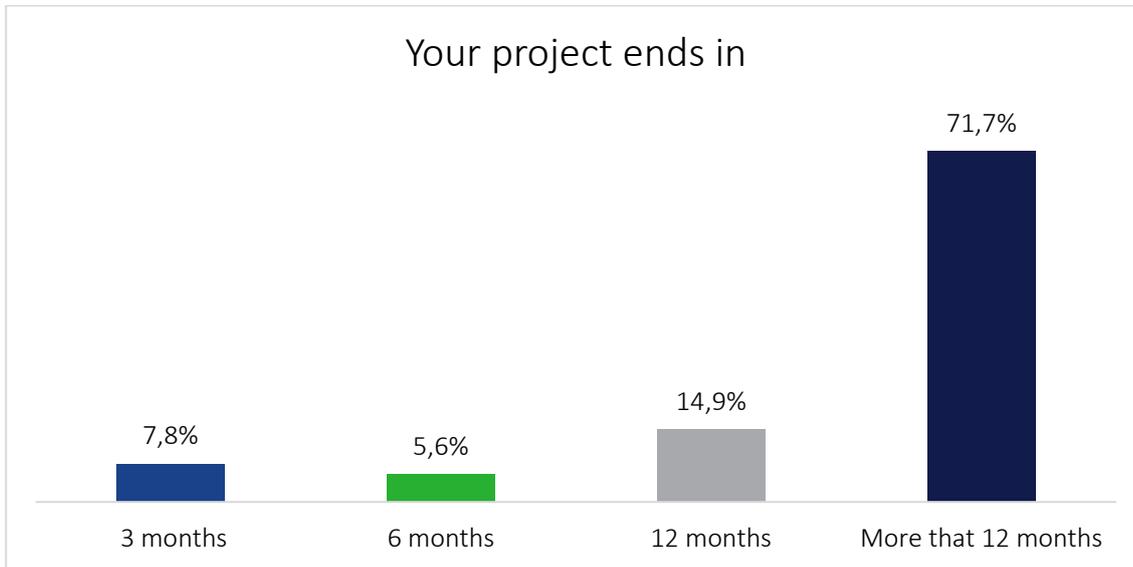


Figure 6: Q6. Timing of the project

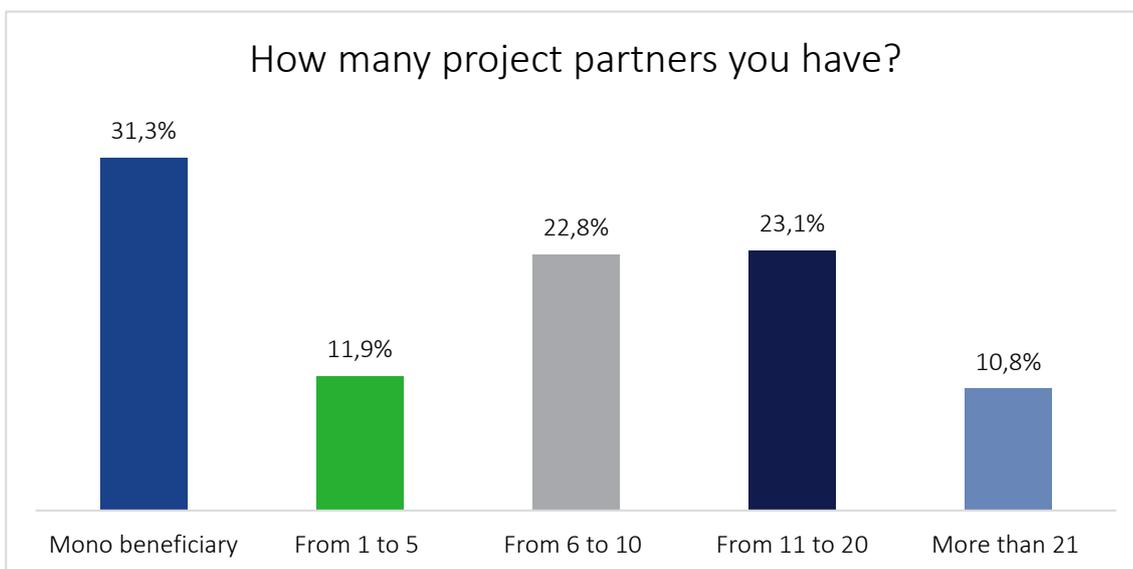


Figure 7: Q7 Number of project partners in the consortium

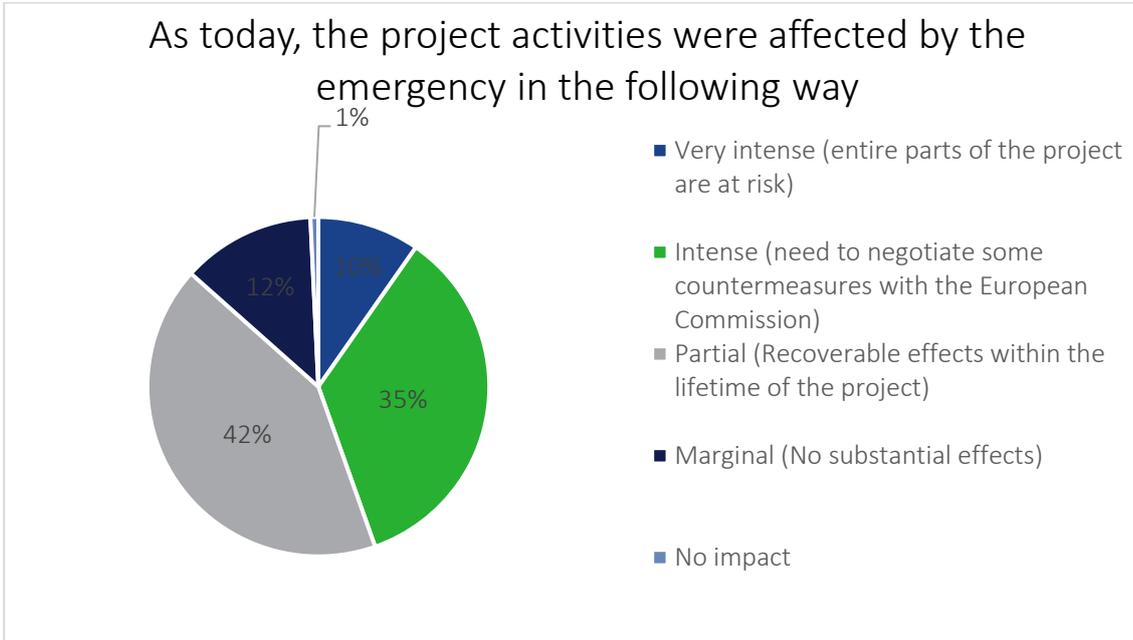


Figure 8: Q8. The way the project was affected by the emergency

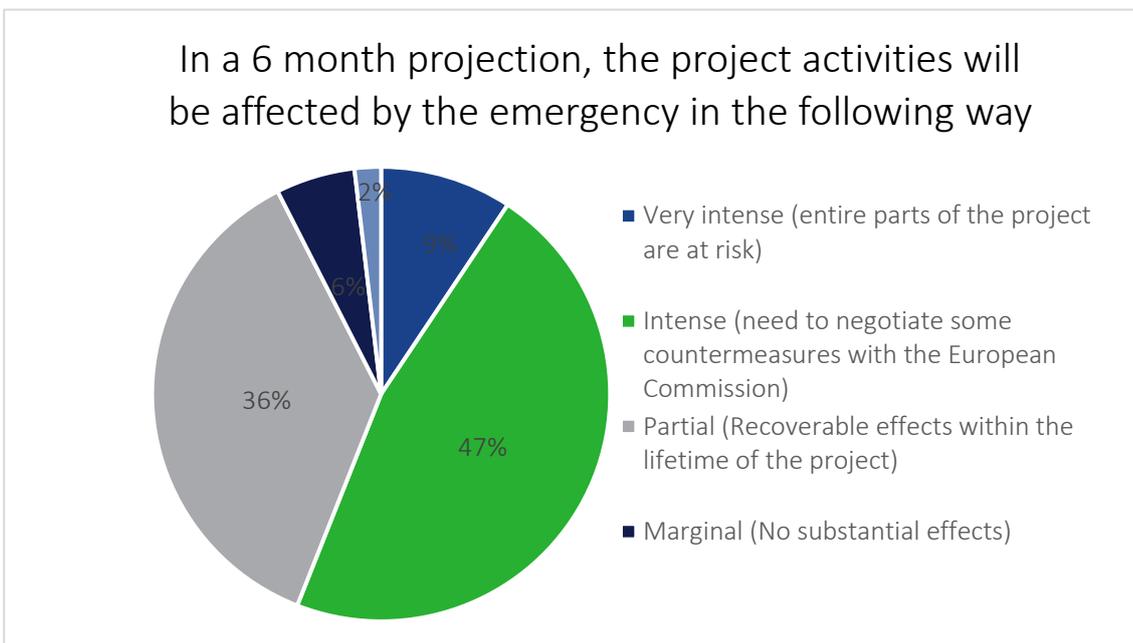


Figure 9: Q9. The way the project is affected by the emergency in a 6 months projection

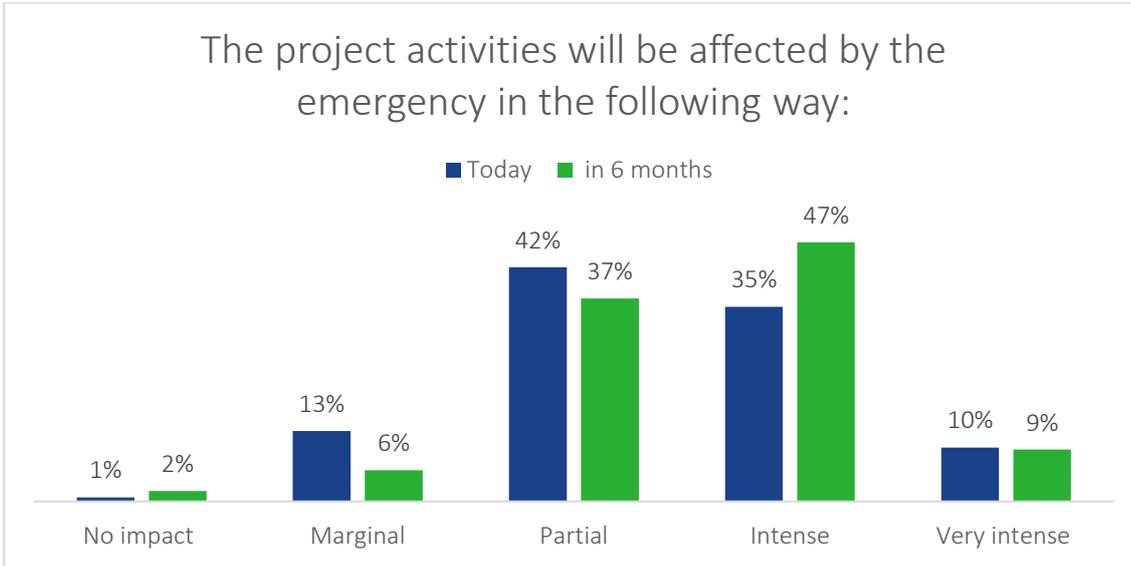


Figure 10: Q10. The ways the emergency can affect the project implementation

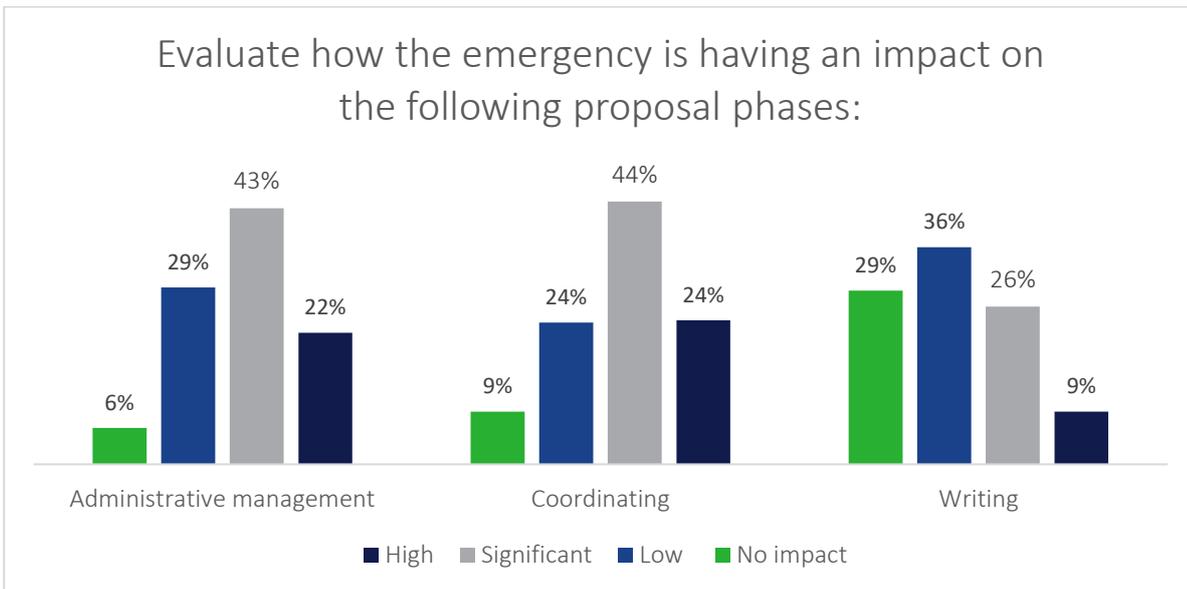


Figure 11: Q11. The impact of the emergency on the three proposal phases

How is the impact of the emergency in redefining your PROFESSIONAL priorities in the medium term period, distracting you from the project preparation activity?

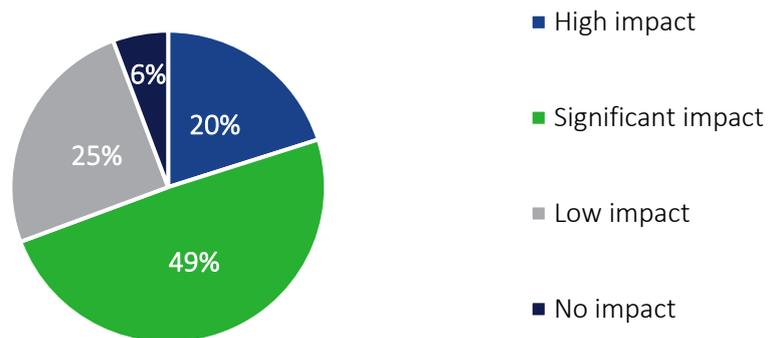


Figure 12: Q12. The impact of the emergency on the respondent's professional priorities

How is the impact of the emergency in redefining your PRIVATE priorities in the medium term period, distracting you from the project preparation activity?

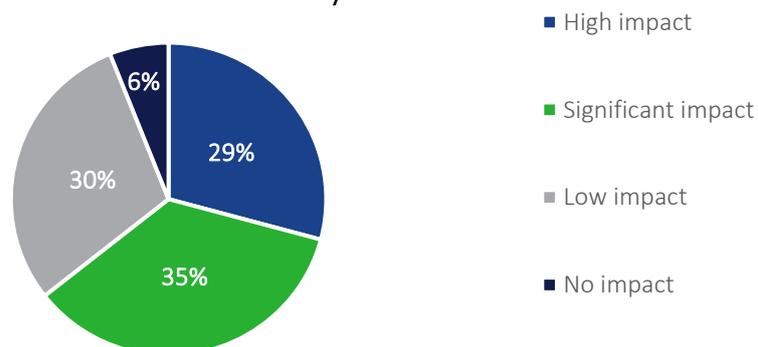


Figure 13: Q13. The impact of the emergency on the respondent private priorities

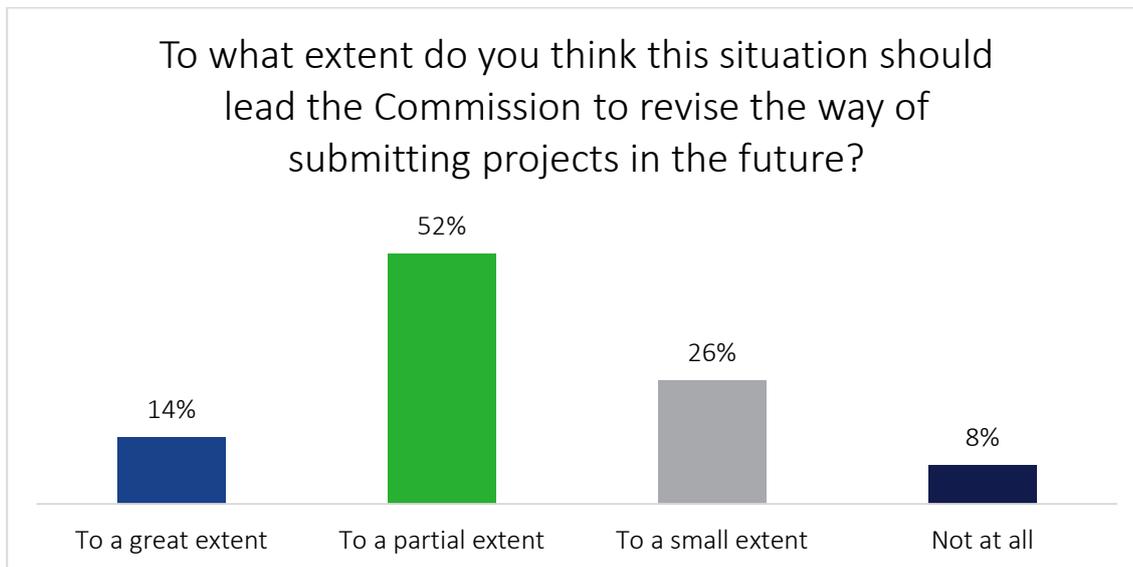


Figure 14: Q14. Respondent opinion on the revision of the way of submitting projects

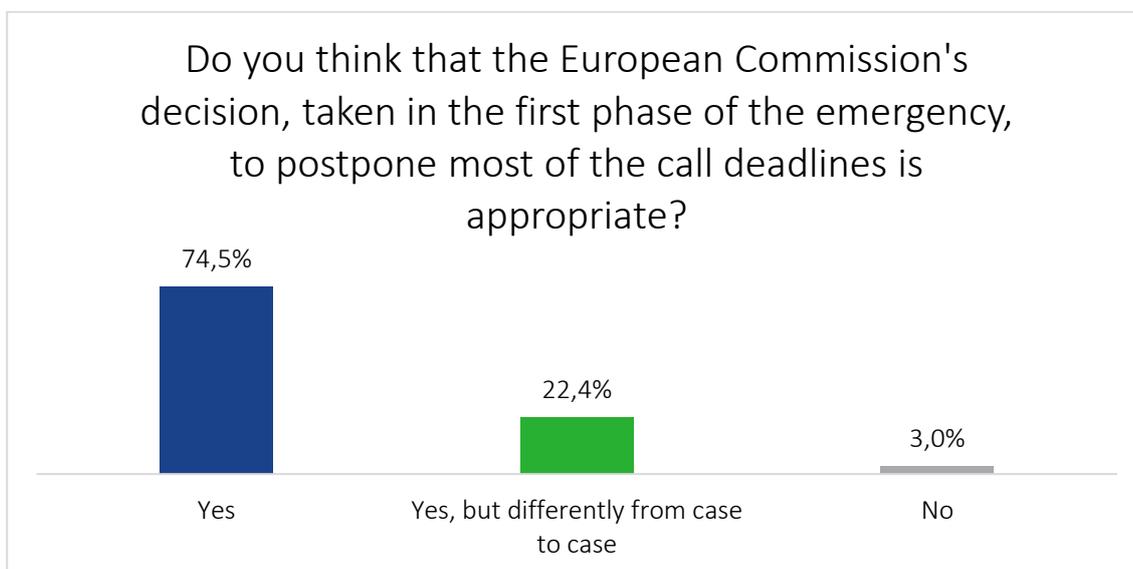


Figure 15: Q15. Respondent opinion on the European Commission's decision to postpone call deadlines

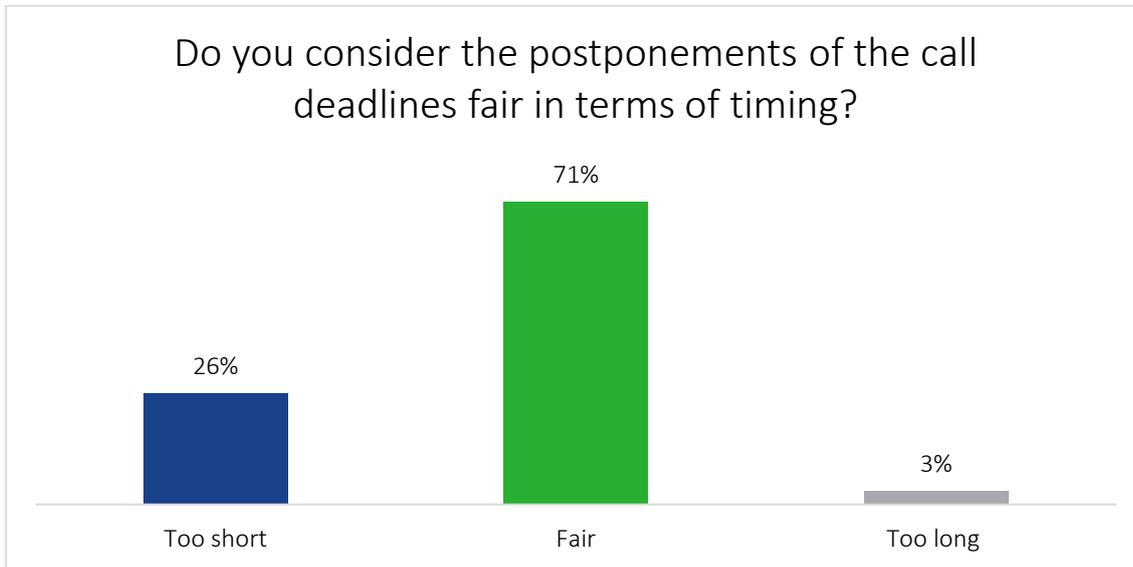


Figure 16: Q16. Respondent opinion on the deadline's postponements in terms of timing

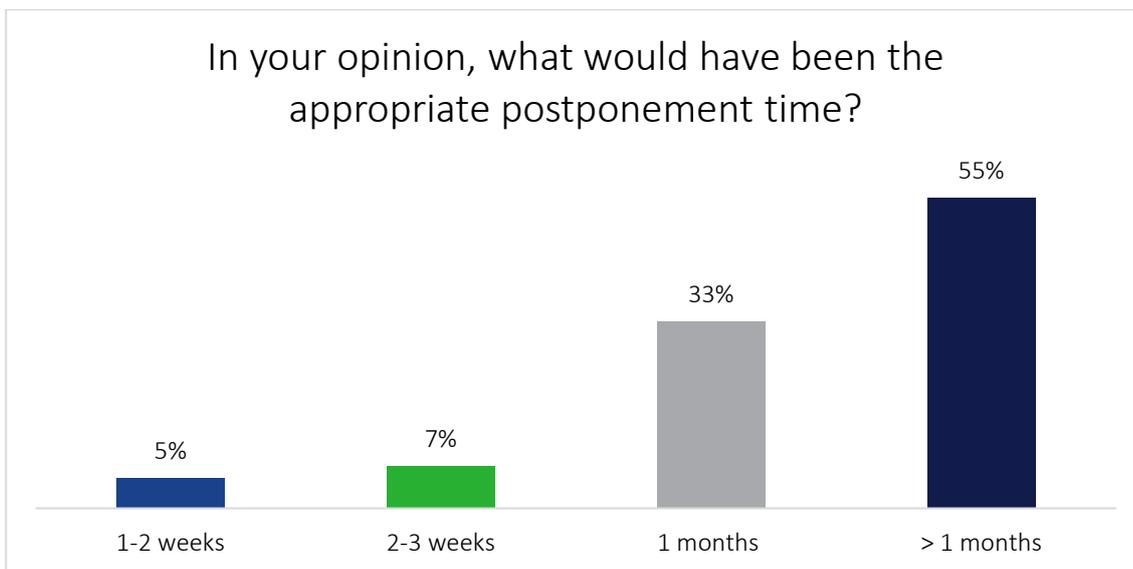


Figure 17: Q17. Respondent opinion on the appropriate postponement time

Among the following, which are in your opinion the mitigation actions that you deem most suitable to manage the critical issues in your project:

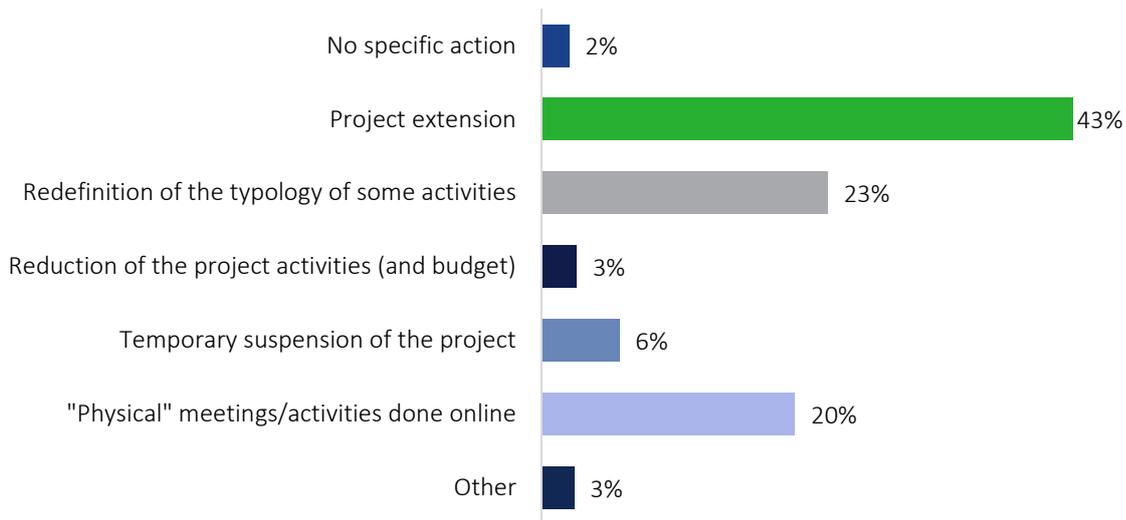


Figure 18: Q18. Respondent opinion on the suitable mitigation actions to manage critical issues

What is your level of knowledge about the clarifications provided so far by the European Commission on the application of article 51 (force majeure) of the MGA - Model Grant Agreement?



Figure 19: Q19. Respondent level of knowledge on article 51 of the MGA

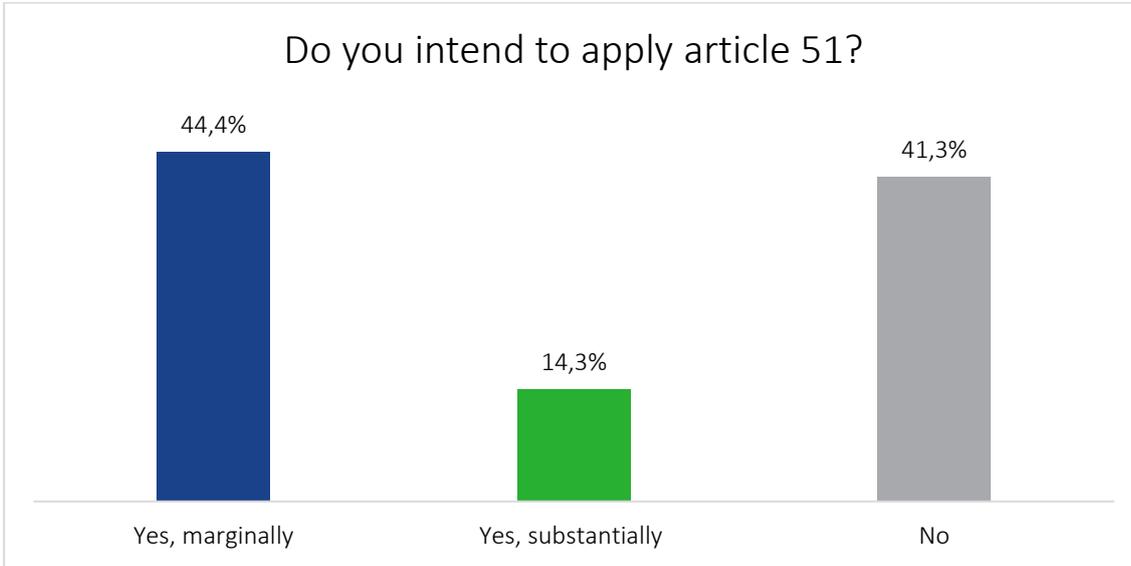


Figure 20: Q20. Intention of respondents to apply article 51

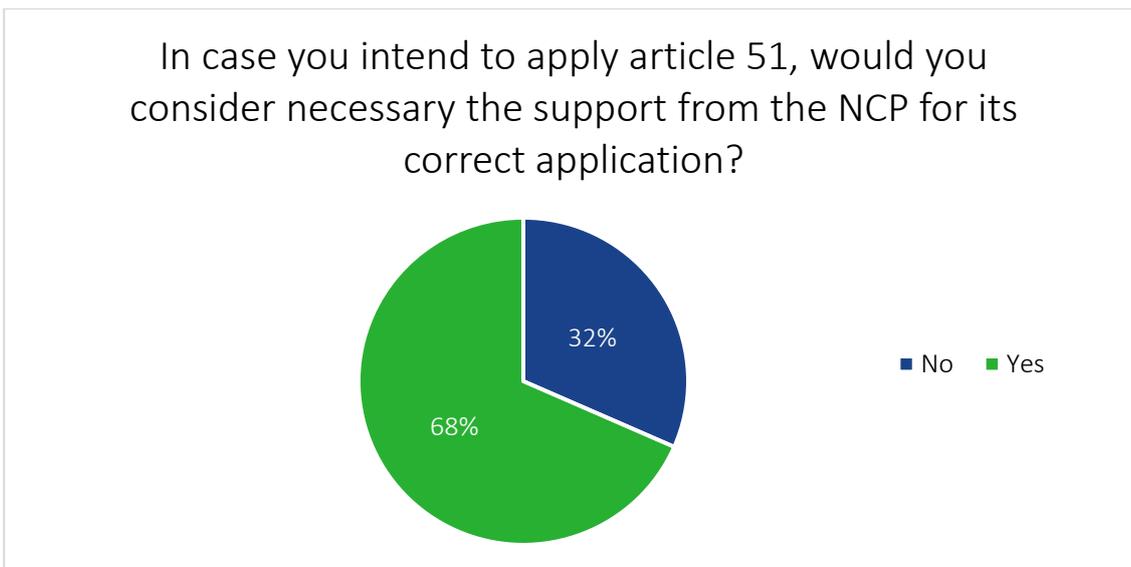


Figure 21: Q21. Role of NCPs in supporting the respondent in the application of Art. 51

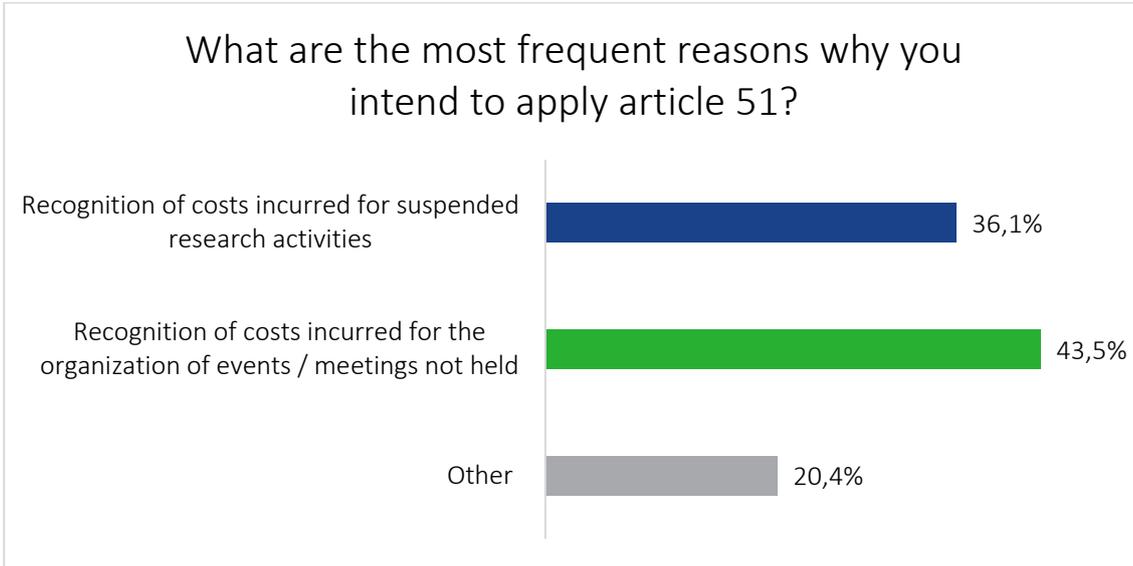


Figure 22: Q22. Reasons to apply Art. 51



Figure 23: Q23. Respondent's intention to ask for a project extension

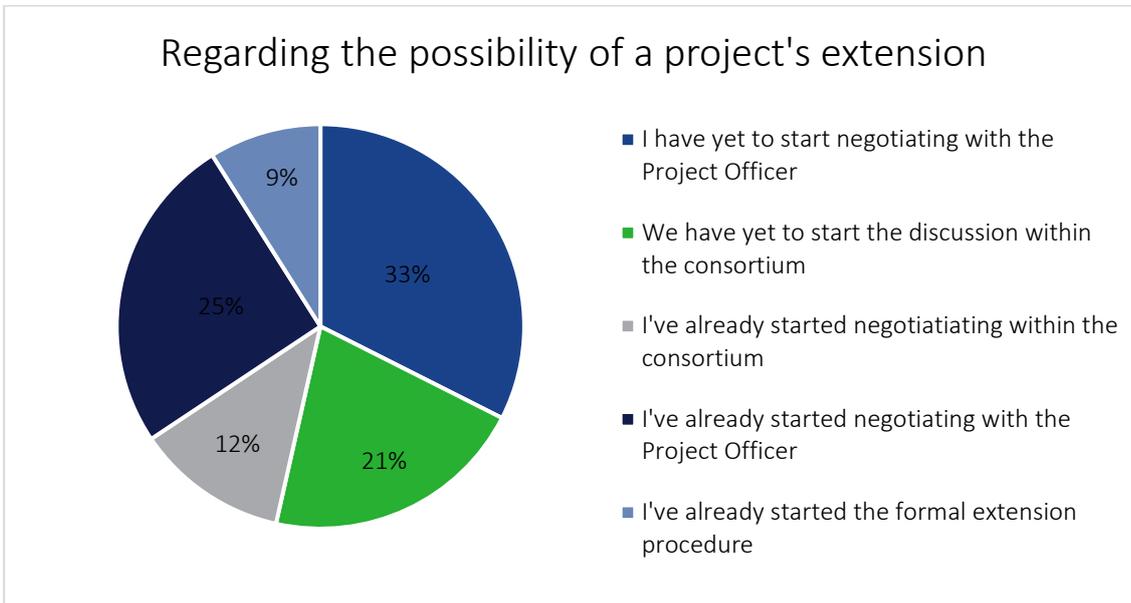


Figure 24: Q24. Respondent's actions towards the project extension

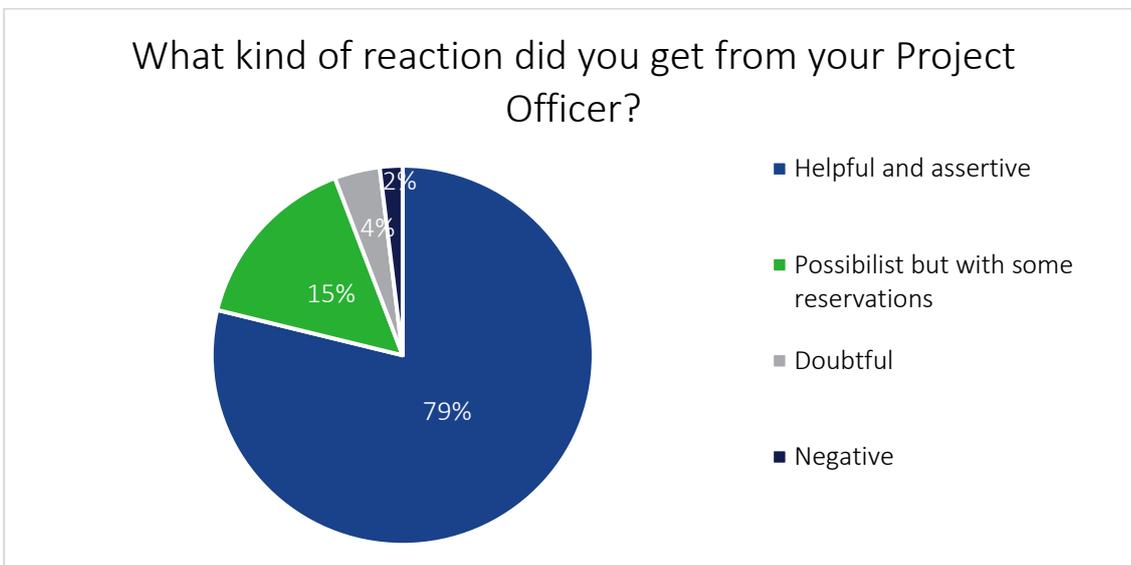


Figure 25: Q25. Project Officer reaction

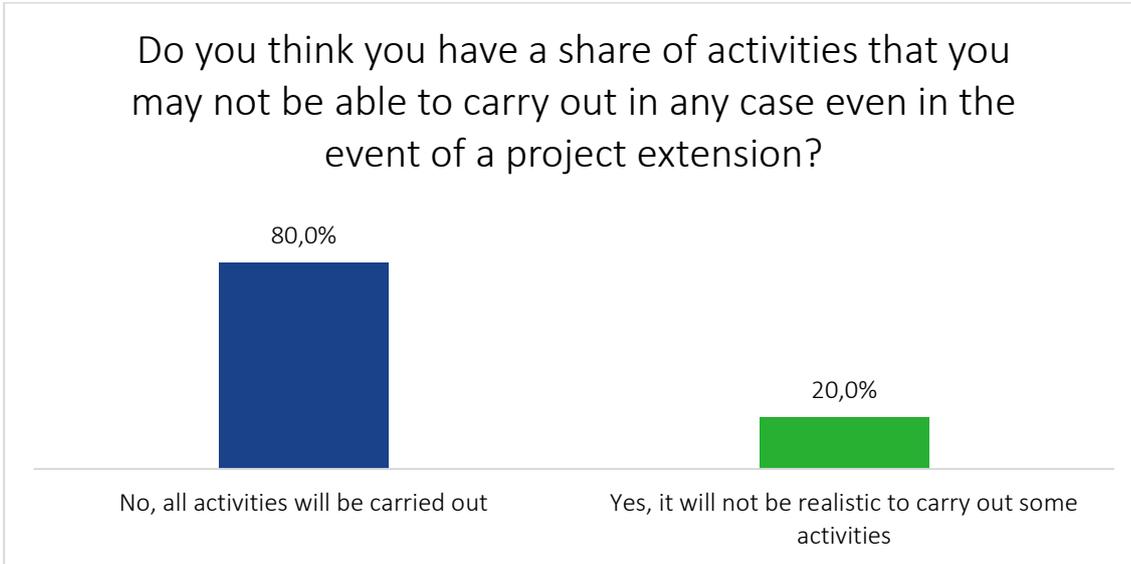


Figure 26: Q26. Activities impossible to be carried out even in presence of a project extension

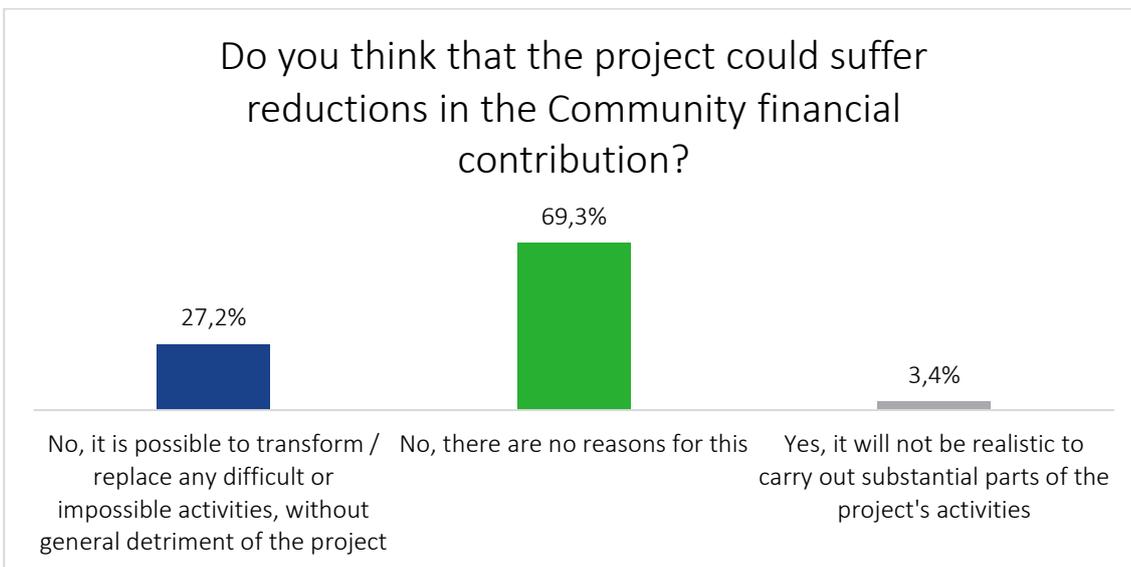


Figure 27: Q27. The impact of the reductions of the community financial contribution on the project

How do you generally assess the availability so far demonstrated by your Project Officer in managing the critical issues of your project?

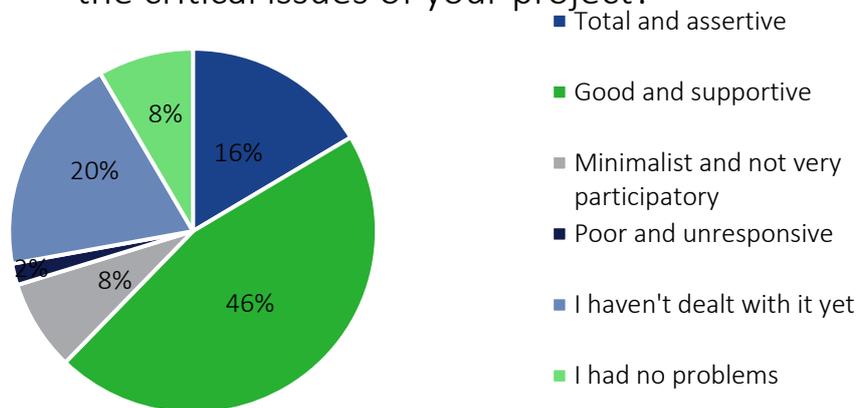


Figure 28: Q28. Perception of Project Officer behaviour in managing critical issues

At this particular stage, which approach do you think the Commission should take to manage mitigation actions?

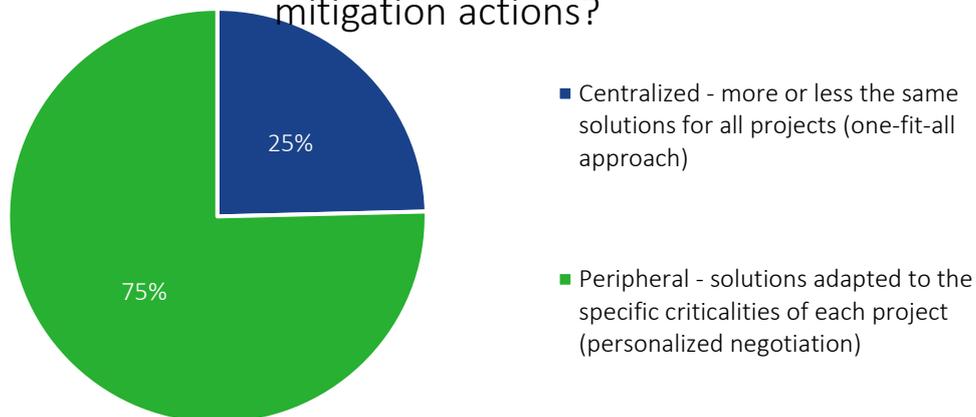


Figure 29: Q29. Respondent's perception on the Commission's attitude towards mitigation actions

To what extent do you think that, after this moment of emergency, what happened will have an impact on the future of the project?

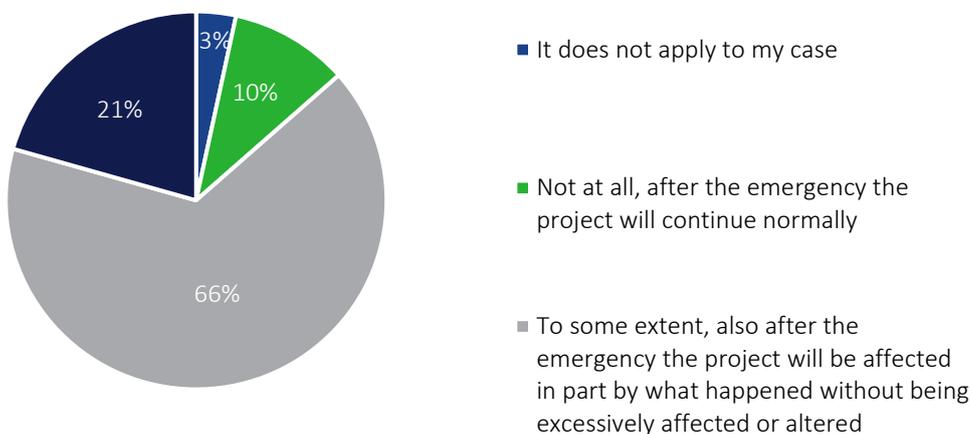


Figure 30: Q30. The impact of Covid19 issue on projects in the future (beyond the emergency phase)

To what extent do you think that the project activities of the future Horizon Europe will be affected by what happened?

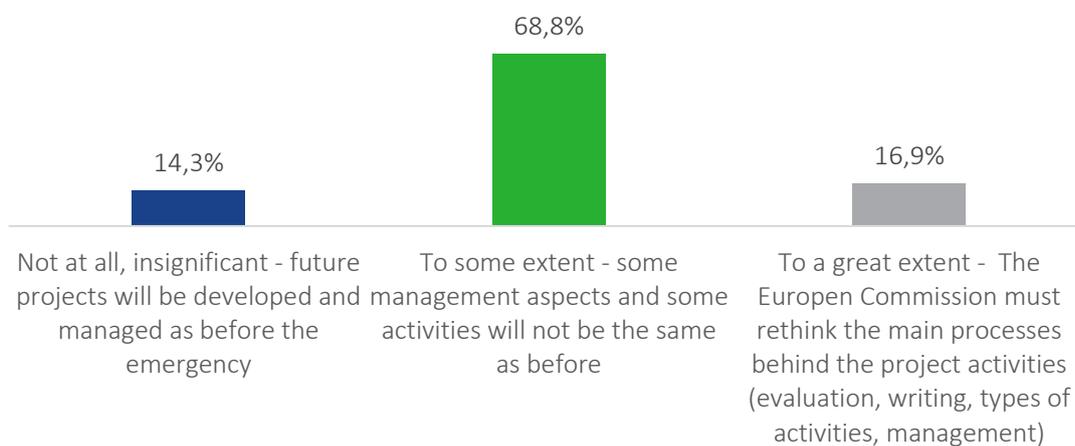


Figure 31: Q31. Impact of the emergency on the future Horizon Europe



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