



## Extraordinary report on the survey distributed to "social theatre operators (artistic facilitators)" on work during the pandemic period

### Introduction

The pandemic period was very difficult for various professions around the world. As a result, even for "social theater practitioners (or artistic facilitators)", it was complex to continue their work. This has not only created serious consequences at the work level for professionals (most of them do not have any legal recognition and barely half of them received explicit economic aid), but also caused significant hardship for the people with whom the Social Theatre Operators worked, namely vulnerable individuals who already often have difficulties with social inclusion.

The survey highlighted the aspects of fragility in which professionals in this delicate sector find themselves operating, and the need to have more important recognition at an institutional level for their own sake and consequently to protect the people involved in the related work groups as well.

Among the aspects that the questionnaire highlights, it can be seen that a good part of the professionals commonly work with more than one vulnerable person: one fifth of them could not continue in any way their activities with vulnerable people, while others were able to adapt in some way by changing their ways of working.

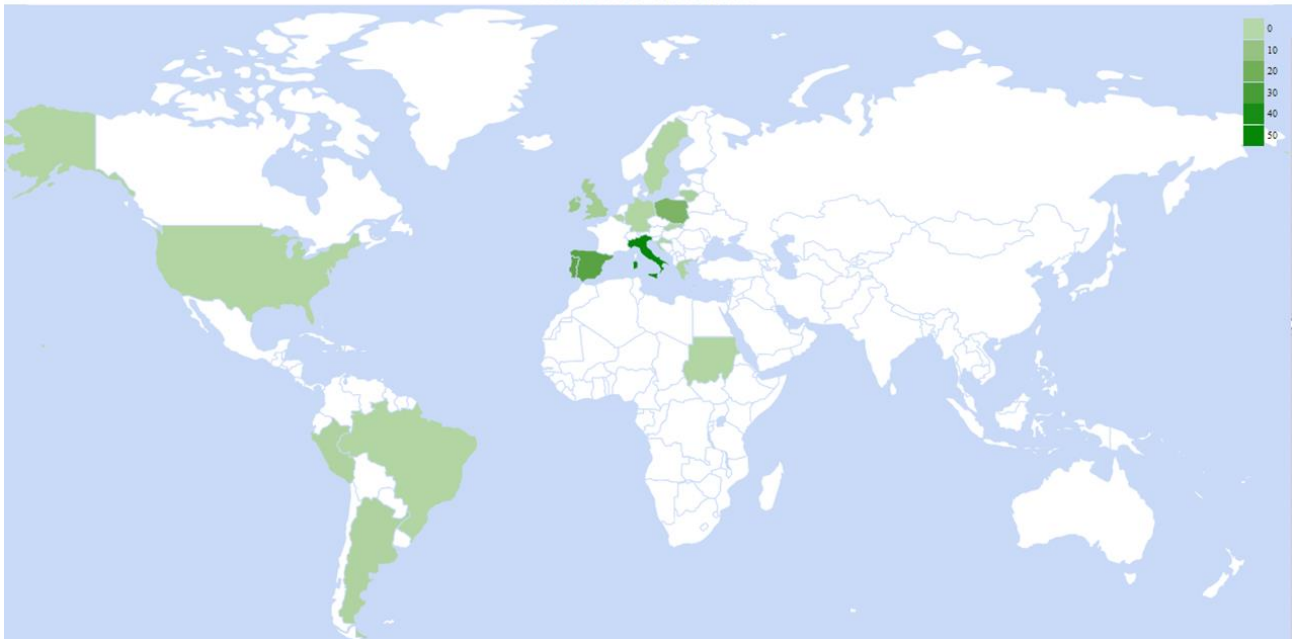
Almost 90% of the respondents believe that the work of the Social Theatre Operator will be important for "social rapprochement" in the near future, thanks to their skills and ways of working.

We hope that this "snapshot" of the questionnaire can be useful both for a "self-awareness" and a greater exchange of information among "social theater operators", but also for a reflection by institutions to understand the value and necessity of this profession.

### The survey

The experience of Social Theater Operators (STOs) during the Covid-19 lockdown period was surveyed through an online dedicated form. The questionnaires were drawn up as part of the Erasmus+ Restore project by "Oltre le Parole Onlus" and distributed by the project partners (Pro-Soc, Pele, Teatr Grodzi, Smashing Times, San Patrignano, Magenta Consultoria, Oltre le Parole onlus). The form was filled in between February and April 2022 by STOs who work throughout Europe. At the end of the data-collection period, 140 STOs coming from 82 EU cities completed the survey.

Where STOs came from?



As we can see from Figure 1 and Table 1, the data collection concerned operators coming from 21 different countries (even outside Europe). The most represented nationalities were Italian (26.6%), Spanish (16.2%), Portuguese (15.6%), and Polish (10.4%). Remarkably 4.4% of STOs were coming from outside the EU.

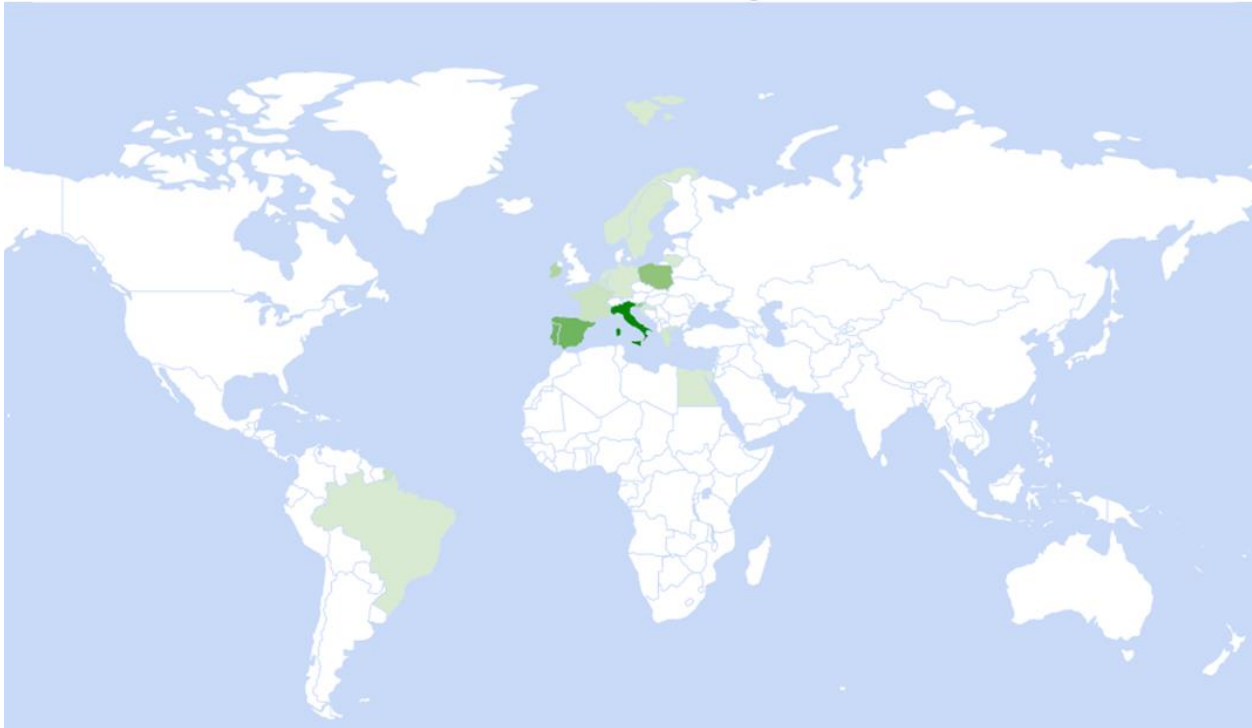
**Table 1. STOs nationality distribution.**

Nationality	%
American	0.6
Argentinian	1.3
Belgian	0.6
Brazilian	0.6
British	2.6
Croatian	0.6
Cypriot	1.3
German	0.6
Greek	1.3
Irish	5.2
Italian	26.6
Lithuanian	1.9
Peruvian	1.3
Polish	10.4
Portuguese	15.6
Scottish	0.6
Slovak	0.6
Slovene	9.1
Spanish	16.2
Sudanese	0.6
Swedish	0.6

Since the operators do not always work in the same country in which they were born, we have analyzed the distribution of the countries in which the operators currently work (Table 2 and Figure 2).

**Figure 2. in which country STOs actually worked.**

Where STOs are working?

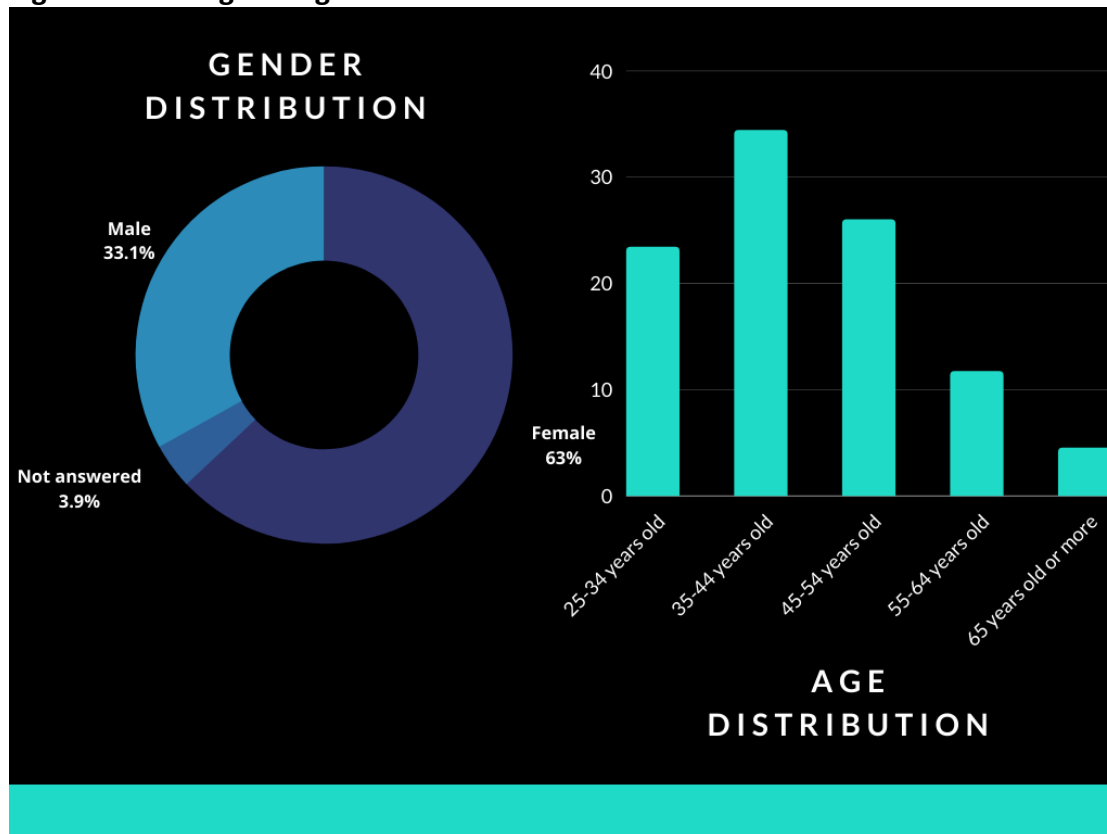


**Table 2. STOs distribution of the nation in which STOs are currently working.**

STOs are currently work in...	%
Belgium	1.3
Brazil	0.7
Croatia	0.7
Cyprus	2.0
Egypt	0.7
France	2.6
Germany	0.7
Greece	1.3
Ireland	6.5
Italy	27.5
Lithuania	0.7
Netherlands	0.7
Norway	0.7
Poland	11.1
Portugal	15.0
Slovenia	9.2
Spain	15.0
Sweden	0.7
UK	3.3

Most of surveyed STOs worked in Italy (27.5%), Portugal (15%), and Spain (15%). Notably, 1.4% of STOs worked outside the EU.

**Figure 3. STOs age and gender distributions**



As we can gather from Figure 3, more than half of the participants were females (63%). In terms of age, the STOs who participated in the data collection were more frequently around 35-44 years old (34.4%), with just 4.5% of them being older than 64 years.

### STOs work-related experience with vulnerable groups.

As showed in Table 3, the participants reported a length of service greater than 10 years nearly in 45% of cases. Approximately 25% of the STOs had a length of service between 5 and 10 years, while the 27.3% worked as STO for 1-5 years. Instead, very Few STOs (i.e., 1.9%) started working in the last 6 months.

**Table 3. STOs length of service**

Length of Service	%
1-6 months	1.9
6-12 months	0.6

1-5 years	27.3
5-10 years	25.3
10 years or more	44.8

For roughly 30% of the respondents, the STO was their main job, whereas for 40.9% of them the STO activities were carried out together with other jobs of equal importance. The 20.1% of STOs had other major jobs in terms of workload and financial incomes and just 9.1% reported being engaged in social theatre as just a volunteer.

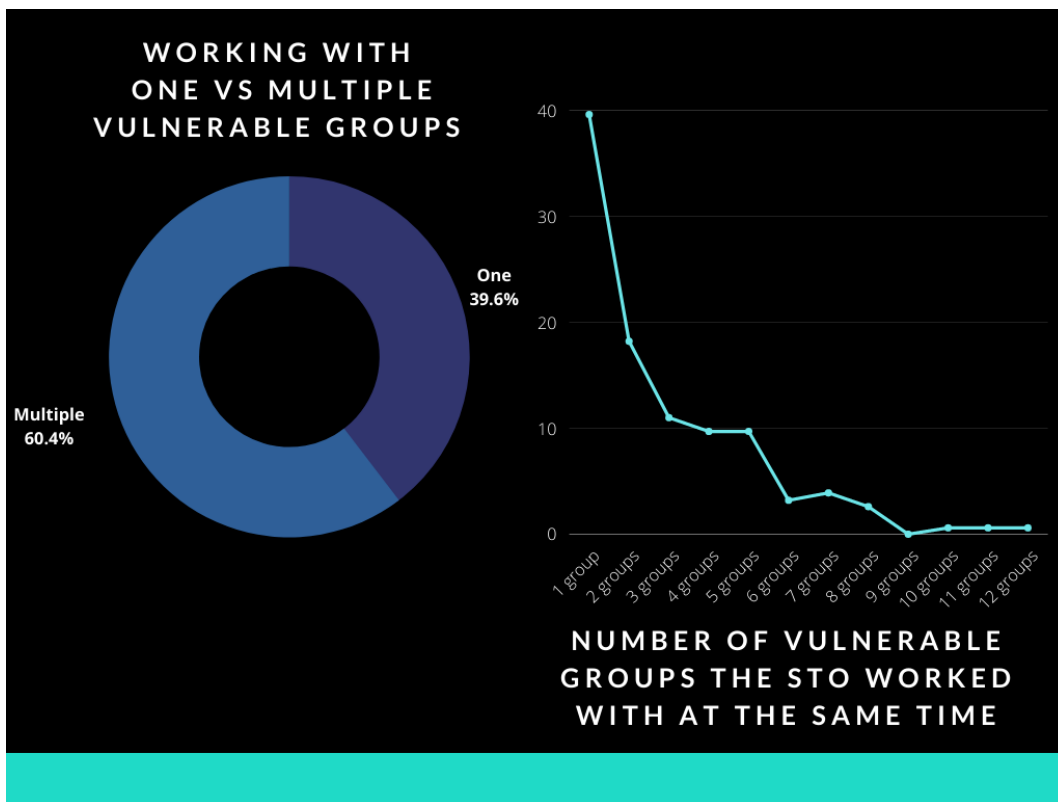
We then analyzed which vulnerable groups the operators were working with at the time of the onset of the pandemic (Table 4).

**Table 4. Vulnerable Groups the STOs worked with at the beginning of Covid-19 outbreak.**

Vulnerable Groups	%
Elderly	27.9
Physical Disabilities	31.8
Learning Disabilities	29.9
Prisoners	9.1
Ethnic Minorities	24.0
Refugees	9.7
Migrants	19.5
Alcohol and Drug Addicted	15.6
Mental Health concerns	20.1
Homeless	9.7
Socially Excluded	30.5
LGBT	11.7
Unspecified others	46.1

Vulnerable groups most involved in the STOs activities were people with physical (31.8%) and learning (29.9%) disabilities, socially excluded people (30%), elderly (27.9%), and ethnic minorities (24%). Instead, homeless (9.7%) and prisoners (9.1%) were less often involved in social theatre activities. Interestingly, the majority of the STOs (46.1%) referred to work also with some unspecified vulnerable groups not accounted for in the data collection.

**Figure 4. STOs involvement with different vulnerable groups.**



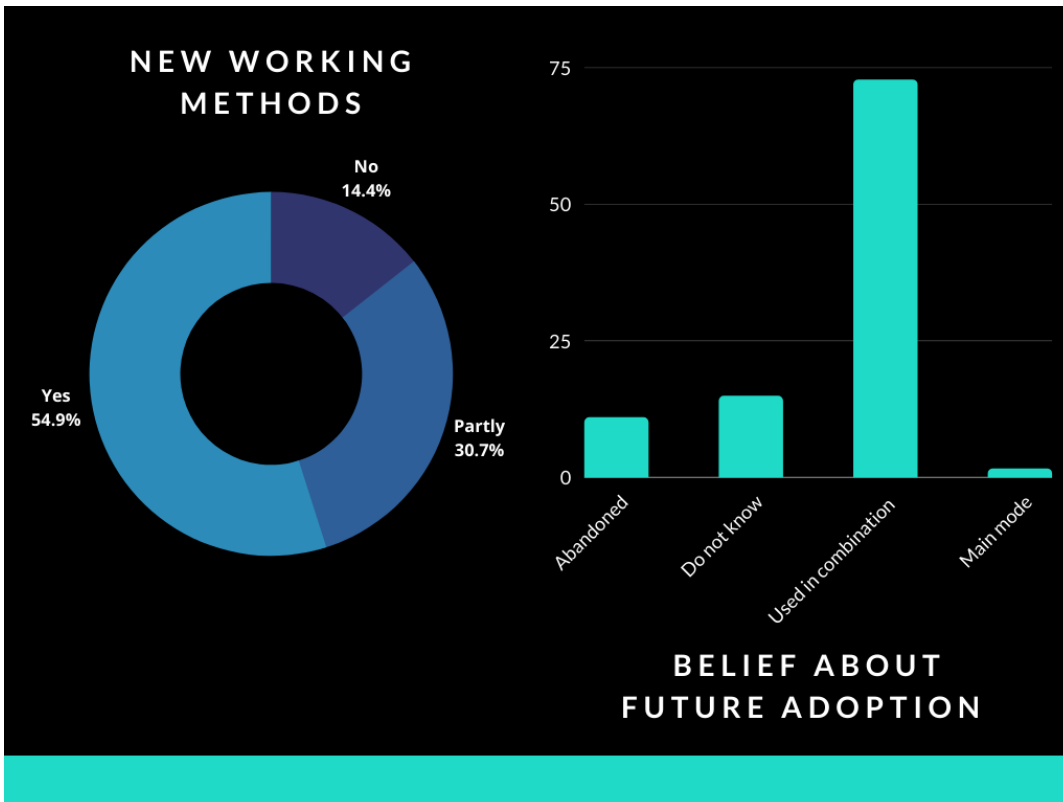
As shown in Figure 4, most of our participants reported working with multiple types of vulnerable groups at the same time (60.4%) when the pandemic was declared, while 39.6% of them worked with just one type of vulnerable people. Considering those who work on multiple vulnerable groups, we noted that the majority of STOs worked with 2 types of groups (18.2%). In general, just very few operators worked with 10, 11 or 12 different vulnerable groups (0.6% for each) at the same time, while most of STOs usually spent their expertise with a number of target groups ranging from 2 to 5.

After the Covid-19 outbreak just the 7.8% of STOs was able to continue working almost in the same way of pre-pandemic period. 61.7% of STOs reported to have at least partially managed to continue with their social theater activities, while 30.5% was unable to continue working. In an explorative way, we tested whether gender affected the STOs continuation of work without finding a statistically significant difference ( $\chi^2_{(4)} = 1.83; p. = 0.77$ ). Apparently, the possibility to continue working with the groups was not different between women and men. Among the STOs who continued their activity during the pandemic, 32.7% of STOs were able to work with their groups only through online meetings, while 38.5% of them managed to have some opportunities to meet face to face in addition to online meetings. Just 15.4% of STOs continued their work almost fully in presence with slightly changes compared to their pre-pandemic activities. Finally, 13.5% of STOs reported having completely changing their way of working.

As for the accomplishment of the objectives their teams had before the pandemic, the STOs

reported that just in the 7.1% of cases they were able to completely meet the goals. Most of STOs (52.6%) managed to partially accomplish the objectives and 40.3% of them could not achieve the goal the group had.

**Figure 5. STOs adoption of new methods during the pandemic and belief about their adoption at the end of it.**



As we can gather from Figure 5, the STOs continued their work with their groups by adopting new methodologies in 54.9% of cases. 30.7% only partially adopted new methods to deal with the conditions due to the pandemic. Just 14.4% of STOs reported that they did not use any new methods to work. Interestingly, the overwhelming majority of participants (72.75%) reported that they believe these new methods will be used in conjunction with the usual activity in the future. As for their personal experience, nearly 58% of STOs reported adopting some new working techniques that would be precious to share with other colleagues.

In the event of suspension of their activity, operators have often remained in contact with the entire group (30.5%) or at least with some of their members (57.8%) beyond work meetings. Just 11.7% of STOs were not able to stay in contact with their groups.

As regards the frequency of these contacts, we observe a certain variability. 41.7% of STOs interacted with their groups at least once a week despite the interruption of their formal activity, while 31.7% of them had a contact with their groups once a month. Instead, approximately 26.6%

of STOs continued interacting with their groups' members few times during the year. In any case, half of STOs (54.1%) reported that during the last year the group they were work with remained almost the same, while the other half saw their group largely change (46.9%). The likelihood of observing a change in the groups' composition during the last year assessed through the Pearson's Chi-square test appeared independent from the group type the STOs was working with.

### STOs job opportunities focus.

March 2020 set the turning point for STOs activities. As we can see for Table 5, 54.6% of STOs did not re-started or had to suspend again their activities after a brief re-start due to the pandemic. Nonetheless, most of the STOs managed to start working again by changing their way of working (41.4%) or were allowed to go back to their usual routine (0.7%). Notably, just a few of STOs reported that they never quit their activity (3.3%).

**Table 5. STOs current activity after March 2020 interruption.**

What happened after March 2020?	%
No stop	3.3
Went back to usual after the suspension	0.7
Re-started by changing ways of working	41.4
Re-started but then suspended again	32.9
No re-start	21.7

In terms of new paid job opportunities, 34.4% of STOs did not received new proposals, while 29.9% of them had some but in other areas of work. However, more than 1/3 of the participants (35.7%) had new job opportunities in the context of their own work.

### STOs facing difficulties and coping activities.

During the pandemic, many STOs (60.4%) tried to develop strategies and work methodologies by interacting with other STOs. In most cases, the interaction happened at local (26%) or international (21.4%) levels. Instead, 39.6% of STOs did not pursue contact with other colleagues to develop new ways of working.

Most of surveyed STOs (57.8%) also referred to have tried to overcome work-related difficulties together with other professionals (e.g., educators, teachers, psychologists, social workers). Almost all these contacts took place outside virtual channels (97.7%).

In terms of financial support related to the suspension of STOs activities, more than half of them



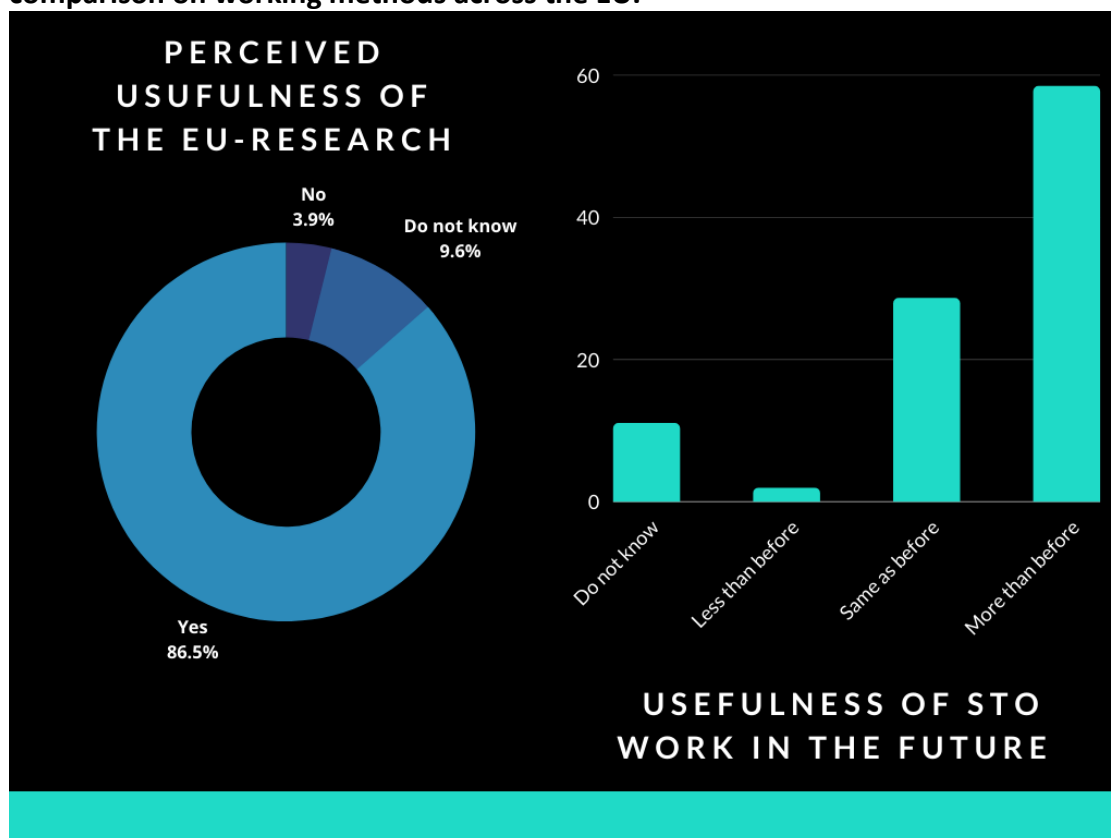
received some sort of compensation (51%) mainly from the state and institutions (85.13%). Instead, the employer provided financial support in 14.86% of cases. 49% of STOs did not receive any form of compensation for the suspended activities.

Notably, almost all STOs (87.16%) did not receive any psychological support despite the difficulties they were facing. In the few cases STOs received some psychological support it was searched privately (36.84%) or granted by the employer (42.10%). State and Institution only provided psychological support in 21.05% of cases.

### STOs perception of the future.

In general, most of STOs (41.8%) believe to be able to return working as they did before the pandemic after summer 2021, while 14.86% of them considered possible a return to the pre-pandemic condition by summer 2021. Nearly half of the participants (41.8%), however, are not sure about when exactly this will happen.

**Figure 6. STOs belief about the usefulness of their work in the future and the need of a comparison on working methods across the EU.**



Most STOs believed that after the pandemic their work will be more useful than before (58.4%) or



at least equally as before (28.6%). Just 1.9% of STOs have developed the conviction that their activities may be less useful than before. 11% did not know (Figure 6).

Finally, almost all respondents (86.4%) believed that comparing working methods and strategies for STOs on the European level would be useful. Just 3.9% of STOs did not consider this comparison useful in some way (Figure 6).