DIGITALEUROPE's COVID-19 response recommendations

DIGITALEUROPE has developed the following recommendations in collaboration with its Executive Advisory Group on COVID-19. The group brings together senior executives from a geographical and sectoral cross-section of Europe's digital and digitising industries, covering everything from early-stage SMEs to established multinationals.

Respond (short-term)

Liquidity and Financial support

1. Establish a one-stop shop to advise EU SMEs on how to deal with the crisis. It should pool practical information on financing and other means designed to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 such as best practices to adapt their business models.

2. Urgently provide finance to help SMEs with liquidity issues through existing EU grants and schemes, opening them to early-stage companies. The EU should also encourage on a national level:

   - Postponing monthly social and fiscal taxes deadlines for SMEs

   - Delaying the repayment of government-based loans and maintaining government-based investments in SMEs

   - Introducing a moratorium on social and tax contributions for the most fragile companies

   - Simplify access to and dedicate a significant portion of government's direct expenditure for SMEs. This should be allocated at the lowest level possible (e.g. municipal / regional) to simplify access for SMEs.

3. Promote and monitor the implementation of the European Commission's March 2020 guidelines concerning free movement of workers. Particularly key is the exemption of ICT professionals and technicians essential for the maintenance of remote working equipment and critical infrastructure (such as telecoms networks and data centres) from the work and movement restrictions (both domestically and cross-border). This includes workers' access to factories, warehouses, data centres and operational support facilities. Equal exemptions should apply to essential workers involved in the manufacturing and delivery of ICT equipment. Governments should provide clear guidelines and minimal documentation requirements, e.g. self-declaration by government-provided template.

4. Promote and monitor the implementation of 'green' (priority) lanes at border crossings for *all* goods, in line with the Commission's March 2020 guidelines. This includes guidance that only minimum documentation is required to transport goods. It should also be ensured that green lanes are open to light goods vehicles as spare parts for the most critical sectors (such as hospitals, banks and utilities) are often delivered individually rather than by bulk.

5. Exempt ICT goods (e.g. servers, storage, networking, end-user devices such as desktop PCs, laptops, monitors, printers, routers etc.) from movement restrictions and internal border controls, as they are essential to keep critical infrastructures running and to enable remote working as well as keeping European citizens connected. To ensure a seamless supply, the EU should also advocate internationally to include ICT equipment in the list of "essential goods" where this distinction is made.

European overview of national actions on health and use of data

6. Avoid fragmentation in health and safety criteria/requirements across Europe to provide clarity and maximise the potential to keep networks up and running. The Commission should also establish a website with a real-time overview of national restrictions and guidance, including translated summaries.

7. On health data, we welcome the European Data Protection Board's intention to issue guidance on health data-processing in the context of COVID-19. But the scope of such guidance should go beyond just processing for scientific and research purposes, as announced. Processing of health data in non-research

circumstances must be clarified too. It is key for healthcare companies and hospitals to unlock new treatment opportunities.

8. Review the feasibility of upcoming product compliance deadlines to meet new standards or regulatory requirements. In some circumstances, reduced, suspended or stopped manufacturing or testing will inhibit the ability of companies to meet planned timelines.

9. Harness the power of technology through a 'digital solidarity' call for firms to contribute to addressing the crisis. National portals to advertise the digital offers have been successfully implemented by [Italy](), [France and Spain](), among others.

Recover (medium-term)

10. Accelerate the development of a common European Health Data Space where the public sector, researchers and private companies can openly share essential data to fight the disease whilst maintaining strong security and data protection safeguards. That could include an EU Code of Conduct on the processing of genetic, biometric, or health data; recognising public interest as appropriate grounds for data usage; and harmonising Member State rules governing health data.

11. Facilitate the development and adoption across Europe of Coronavirus 'tracing' solutions, such as apps and other technologies, to better target testing and self-isolation as the lockdown measures are eased. The apps should be compatible across borders and respect privacy.

12. Regulators should provide and promote practical guidance for organisations' procurement teams on legal requirements and compliant solutions for remote working activities (including applicable certifications) – particularly in sectors

sensitive to data privacy and security concerns, such as health, education and finance.

13. Cyber authorities should collaborate with the private sector to provide guidance on remote work security for businesses, who are at increased risk of cyber attacks during the crisis. New paths of communication and work environments create new security risks. Guidance notes, webinars and appropriate solutions have been provided by the likes of ENISA (EU cyber agency), NCSC in the UK and CISA and NIST in the US.

14. Review measures that may delay or prohibit deployment of digital services, particularly in critical sectors such as of remote health and education solutions, such as requirements for hosting solutions on premise or for in-person medical consultations or prescriptions. Refer to internationally recognised regulatory standards and certifications for data security and privacy controls, and facilitate the use of cloud-based solutions that meet such standards and certifications.

Financial support

15. Make EU and national finance available for organisations to invest in equipment and services that allow them to operate remotely. Such equipment includes laptops, monitors and home network equipment like routers. Services include collaboration software offerings, security services to protect the devices, networks and data and cloud-based networking services. At the company level, network and compute capabilities are necessary to support a remote work environment. Finance mechanisms could include vouchers, tax credit/deductions, loans and funding programmes (e.g. the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative).

16. Build large scale public- private partnerships to digitise SMEs as part of a sustainable recovery.

17. Re-deploy European structural and cohesion funds (ESF, ERDF, etc.) to help firms retain and upskill their talents.

Reinvent (long-term)

European renewal with focus on digital and green transformation

18. Stimulus funds should focus on the digitisation and enhanced connectivity of sectors such as health, education, public administration, food and agriculture, manufacturing and transport. The digital transformation should be founded on

openness (i.e. non-dependency), simplicity, intelligence, automation, trust and security as we look to build new business models, processes, software and systems.

19. Integrate the proposed economic stimulus packages with the European Green Deal. The digital transformation is at the heart of the EU's climate leadership and our economic recovery. We should accelerate investments in, for example, energy efficiency, transport, low carbon buildings and industrial processes, where digitalisation has a key role to play.

20. Ensure the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) is forward-looking and invest more in digital transformation, green growth, digital infrastructure, and digital skills. A target for spending cohesion funds on digital connectivity should be introduced, as previously adopted for urban development. Such a target should be in the range of the best-practice of 8% spent by Sweden (versus about 3% in the previous MFF).

21. Accelerate the roll-out of ubiquitous high capacity and secure networks, incentivising private investment and boosting funding for rural and sparsely populated areas. Planned spectrum allocations that may have been delayed due to the COVID-19 crisis should also be accelerated once normal operations recommence. At that future time, governments should also prioritise further new allocations of spectrum for broadband – both licence-exempt and licensed, to make wireless connectivity more robust.

Digital inclusion and resilience

22. Encourage policies that encourage collaboration between digital companies and universities or vocational centres to integrate digital skills into the curricula,

23. Establish a common European fund for reskilling of the European workforce to ensure digital competences and future resilience towards lock downs and unemployment.

International leadership

24. Building upon the spirit of the WTO Information Technology Agreement, the elimination of import tariffs on ICT equipment would help to reduce costs and further public and private investment in remote working and digital transformation.