

Final reports of the EU Observatory on the online platform economy

The EU Observatory for the Online Platform Economy, which informs the policy work of the Commission, by providing independent views on some of the key questions that have arisen in connection to the platform economy is today publishing the final reports from the expert group following stakeholder feedback and reactions on the progress reports which were published for consultation in July 2020.



In addition to the stakeholder feedback and the reactions received, further research work conducted allowed the experts to further refine the reports. In 2020 the expert group focused its work on additional topic of platform power, which has become increasingly relevant for the policy debate in the EU and beyond. Thus, at the end of its first mandate, the expert group is putting forward the set of five papers, which represent its final report.

These reports are, in more specific detail:

- The **Report on Measurement and Economic Indicators**, which aims to identify the indicators that could be used to monitor the online platform economy for the purposes of policy-making and further regulation, and to recommend actions for making data available in the areas where it is currently lacking. The report suggests that actors such as statistical agencies and industry associations should collect more data on a variety of aspects such as trade mediated by platforms or turnover generated on online platforms. It also offers suggestions as regards new, conceptual approaches to measuring platform size and “data on data” meaning how data is monitored and measured, and makes recommendations concerning data generated by the internal complaint-handling procedures mandated by the P2B Regulation. This report has

remained unchanged in relation to the first version as far as the indicators assessed are concerned.

- The focus of the **Report on differentiated treatment** is an analysis of differentiated treatment, which occurs when a platform applies dissimilar conditions to business users in equivalent situations, as a potential source of ‘unfairness’ in the relationship between platforms and their business users in the online platform economy. It distinguishes between practices of self-favouring, whereby a platform gives preferential treatment to its own vertically integrated activities over those of rivals, and more general practices of differentiated treatment where one or more business users are treated more favourably than others. The report concludes that close monitoring of the sector should continue and focused studies to scrutinise the impact of problematic practices should be conducted. This report has been subject to limited edits compared to its first version.
- The **Report on Data** in the online platform ecosystem has been further developed from the progress report draft. The structured overview that it aims to present, of how data is generated, collected and used in the online platform economy, and what the main policy issues are in these regards, has been further refined based on research by the Observatory. The report concludes by identifying key issues, which, in the view of the authors, deserve further analysis; it emphasizes that the Observatory reflections on the topic of data are still work in progress and recommends that the Observatory continues to work on this beyond the first mandate of this expert group.
- On **Platform Power**, the Expert Group has prepared two contributions: one is a report focusing on platforms power in general and the other is a case study focusing on online advertising.
 - The first report, **Uncovering blind spots in the policy debate on platform power**, takes stock, through a multi-disciplinary approach, of platform power sources and issues resulting therefrom. Platforms have generated great innovation and created convenient services for consumers, as well as facilitated access to markets for businesses, all of which has made some of them tremendously successful. This very success has, over time, due *inter alia* to network and scale effects, resulted in a situation where few platforms wield unprecedented power in several markets and in our society more broadly. In this environment, there is a growing debate about the implications of this power – economically, such as for businesses and consumers who use the platforms, but also more widely, from a societal perspective. The COVID-19 crisis has made even more visible the major role taken up by platforms. The expert group’s paper on this topic attempts to map out some of these issues.
 - The second, a case study on **Market power and transparency in open display advertising** is as an illustration, by means of a case study, of platform power in a particular market.

About the Expert Group of the EU Observatory for the Online Platform Economy and next steps

The EU Observatory for the Online Platform Economy, which informs the policy work of the Commission, by providing independent views on some of the key questions that have arisen in connection to the platform economy, and its expert group is composed of 15 independent academics with a high level of expertise in platform markets, with background in economics, law or information and communication sciences, and is supported by a dedicated team of Commission staff. Their work has also informed the policy work of the Commission and contributed to the evidence base gathered in the Impact Assessment report accompanying the proposal on contestable and fair markets in the digital sector (Digital Markets Act).

In Q1 2021, the mandate of the expert group is going to be renewed and extended for 2 years.

More information

- Final reports
- EU Observatory for the Online Platform Economy

Related topics

Shaping the Digital Single Market Online platforms and e-commerce

Source URL:

<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/news/final-reports-eu-observatory-online-platform-economy>