



European  
Commission

# Study on data sharing between companies in Europe

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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# Executive summary

## Deepening the understanding about B2B data sharing and re-use in the European Economic Area

Following its Communication on 'Building a European Data Economy' in early 2017, the European Commission launched a study to deepen its understanding about data sharing and re-use in business-to-business relations in the European Economic Area (EEA). This study ran from July 2017 to February 2018 and was particularly aimed at:

- Estimating the quantitative dimension of data sharing and re-use between companies inside the EEA
- Identifying missed business opportunities resulting from the lack of access to relevant data from other companies
- Determining the obstacles to data sharing and re-use between companies
- Ascertaining success factors for data sharing between companies

This study targeted companies with different sizes<sup>1</sup> operating in six particular sectors<sup>2</sup> in 31 countries<sup>3</sup>. It specifically considered machine-generated data, which entail data produced without the direct intervention of a human by sensors or by computer processes, applications and services. The study did not distinguish between personal and non-personal data following the assumption that companies comply with relevant data protection legislation.

Further evidence in relation to the interest and current engagement in B2B data sharing has been gathered, along with relevant insights about the European data economy ecosystem. This study generally corroborated findings from previous research and consultation exercises.

## The concept of B2B data sharing is not commonly known and fully understood

Although this study confirmed that companies are already sharing and re-using data among them, it also revealed that the concept of *B2B data sharing* remains rather unknown and is not completely understood. Moreover, different terminology is being used to refer to the exchange of data between companies for business purposes (such as *data transfer and access* or *data sharing and re-use*) which may have led to misinterpretations of the concept.

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<sup>1</sup> Considering Eurostat's classification of 'enterprise size', this study targeted companies with four different sizes: large (250 or more employees), medium (50 to 249 employees), small (10 to 49 employees) and micro (less than 10 employees).

<sup>2</sup> The study particularly focused on six business sectors: data-generating driving (i.e. automotive, transport and logistics), smart agriculture, smart manufacturing, telecom operators, smart living environments (i.e. home automation, sensors, robotics, or wearable technology), and smart grids & meters.

<sup>3</sup> The targeted countries comprised the 28 EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

This study provides three key messages to clarify what 'B2B data sharing' means:

- Companies that engage in B2B data sharing do not necessarily grant access to their complete datasets. The proportion of data shared by companies usually depends of their business strategy.
- The term 'sharing' should not be understood as 'for free'. There are different business models governing 'B2B data sharing' (which may entail a payment for giving access to data) and others may still be created as the data economy evolves.
- Companies ultimately decide with whom they wish to share their data with. Although there may be legislation in force that regulates access to certain data, companies have autonomy and control over the data they want to share and in relation to the usage conditions they want to set.

## **B2B data sharing can take different forms**

Distinct business models for engaging in B2B data sharing have been identified:

- *Data monetisation*: unilateral approach under which companies make additional revenues from the data they share with other companies. Data can also be monetised through the provision of services.
- *Data marketplaces*: trusted intermediaries that bring data suppliers and data users together to exchange data in a secure online platform. These businesses make revenue from the data transactions occurring in the platform.
- *Industrial data platforms*: collaborative and strategic approach to exchange data among a restricted group of companies. They voluntarily join these closed, secure and exclusive environments to foster the development of new products/services and/or to improve their internal efficiency. Data may be shared for free, but fees may also be considered.
- *Technical enablers*: businesses specialised in and specifically dedicated to enabling data sharing through a technical solution. Revenues are obtained from setting up, using, and/or maintaining the solution (not from the data exchanged).
- *Open data policy*: companies that opt to share data for free to foster the development of new products and/or services.

Considering that the potential of the European data economy is just unfolding, new approaches to B2B data sharing may still emerge.

### **This study confirms that companies share and re-use data among them**

Considering the findings from recent research, as well as the evidence collated through the European Commission's public consultation on 'Building a European data economy', this study allowed for a firmer confirmation that companies are engaged in B2B data sharing and re-use. Around 40 % of the surveyed companies reported to share and/or re-use data with/from other companies. Although results from this study or from existing research cannot be generalised, there is a clear indication that many companies are already contributing to fostering a European data economy because they decided to transfer and/or access data in business-to-business relations.

### **There is indication that B2B data sharing and re-use will significantly grow in a near future**

Although not yet engaged in B2B data sharing and re-use, a considerable proportion of companies expects to start sharing and re-using data in the next five years. They also recognise the potential benefits of these activities. Future data suppliers expect that data sharing may help them to establish partnerships with other companies, monetise their data and generate additional revenues, and support innovation. Future data users foresee that accessing data from other companies may increase the possibility for developing new products and/or services, improve their relationship with clients, or enhance their catalogue of products. Companies also indicated the factors that can potentially increase their willingness to share data in the future, including legal clarity about "data ownership rights", ability to track the usage of data, and increased certainty about the nature of and procedures related to licensing agreements.

### **Companies engage in B2B data sharing and re-use to enhance their business opportunities and improve internal efficiency**

Both data suppliers and data users share and re-use data with/from other companies to explore the possibility of developing new business models and/or new products and services. Additionally, data suppliers appear to engage in B2B data sharing to establish partnerships with other companies, and to generate revenue from the monetisation of their data. In turn, data users seem to be interested in accessing data from other companies to enhance their catalogue of products and/or services, as well as to improve their internal efficiency.

## **Investing a critical amount of money in accessing real-time or localisation/positioning data may have a positive impact on a company's business**

Within the framework of this study, 'missed business opportunities' were defined as new or improved products and/or services that a company was not able to bring to the market due to the impossibility of accessing data from other companies. This study concluded that many companies seem to be missing business opportunities because presumably they did not re-use data from other companies, but particularly due to the lack of sufficient investment in accessing real-time and/or positioning/localisation data from other companies. Although the results of this study need to be interpreted with caution<sup>4</sup>, there is an indication that companies may be able to enhance their business opportunities (i.e. bring more new or improved products and/or services to the market) if they spend a critical amount of money in acquiring real-time and/or positioning/localisation data from other companies.

## **Most data suppliers and data users appear to share and re-use data within their own business sector**

The results from the survey provide clear indication that both data suppliers and data users tend to share and re-use data within the business sector in which they operate. The two most common types of data shared and re-used are data generated by internal IT business systems<sup>5</sup>, along with data generated by the Internet-of-Things. From these types of data, real-time data and transactional data are the features of data most commonly shared and re-used. Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) appear to be the most preferred technical mechanism to share and re-use data with/from other companies.

## **Data suppliers share only a small proportion of the data they hold**

Evidence from this study and previous research and consultation exercises suggests that companies provide access to a small fraction of the data they generate and/or have access to (with due permission from private individuals). Data suppliers make strategic and thoughtful choices in relation to the data they decide to share (or not). Furthermore, there may be certain features of data that are intentionally not made available to other parties to comply with relevant legislation and/or to protect private individuals.

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<sup>4</sup> Although the study managed to gather a suitable number of answers to the survey, they do not allow for a generalisation of results.

<sup>5</sup> Data generated by internal IT business systems include information about products, services, sales, logistics, customers, partners or suppliers.

## **Technical and legal obstacles are hindering B2B data sharing, while denial of access is a common barrier among companies re-using data**

This study corroborated findings from previous research by indicating that the most common *obstacles to data sharing* are technical barriers and related costs, as well as legal obstacles. More concretely, technical barriers may include lack of interoperability, safety and security requirements, or curation and infrastructure costs. Legal obstacles may entail the uncertainty about “data ownership” and what can be lawfully done with the data, along with difficulties in meeting the legal requirements on data protection in a business-to-business context. On the other hand, *obstacles to data re-use* include denial of or discriminating and costly conditions to access relevant datasets, along with lack of interoperability and data standardisation.

## **Trust and simplicity are just some of the elements that help companies to successfully share data in business contexts**

The insights gathered through the interviews with companies that are already engaged in B2B data sharing allowed for the identification of elements that helped companies to successfully pursue this activity. Building trust with data users and data suppliers, understanding the demand for data, establishing partnerships, identifying concrete use cases about what can be done with the data, and putting in place simple and user-friendly tools proved to be key success factors for B2B data sharing.

## **Recommendations for future policy-making**

The European Commission should [further develop the concept of B2B data sharing](#) and related terminology together with companies and stakeholders. This will avoid misinterpretations and bridge the existing gap of knowledge and lack of understanding with regard to data sharing and re-use in business-to-business relations.

As supported by many companies and stakeholders, the European Commission and national governments should [keep a minimal regulatory approach](#) to foster B2B data sharing. In addition, soft policy measures are needed to complement the existing legal framework. The European Commission is encouraged to [continue adopting policy and practice-oriented instruments](#), such as communications, recommendations, resolutions, toolkits or guidelines. This will bring more clarity and provide guidance to companies interested in making their data available and/or accessing data from others.

In combination with the actions above, the European Commission should [organise awareness-raising campaigns](#) to engage more companies in B2B data sharing. More concretely, the campaigns could focus on explaining the different forms data sharing can take in business-to-business relations, as well as the benefits that can result from this activity. These campaigns are also aimed at ensuring that the current legal and policy

frameworks are generally known by businesses from all sizes operating in the European Economic Area.

To be able to assist companies in gaining a more practical understanding of relevant legal documents, the European Commission is called on to [provide guidance in relation to relevant regulations and directives](#). Considering that some legal instruments have been recently reviewed and new laws are going to be issued soon, such guidance will help companies to understand well the legal framework related to B2B data sharing, what can be legally done with the data, and how to deal with cases of data misuse. In addition, the European Commission should [monitor and evaluate the implementation of regulations and directives](#) from the perspective of B2B data sharing and re-use. This will ensure that the existing legal instruments are fit for purpose and useful for European companies and citizens.

Considering that B2B data sharing and re-use is expected to grow in the next few years, the European Commission should [create a B2B data sharing framework](#). This generic framework is intended to set out basic concepts, principles and conditions for engaging in B2B data sharing and re-use. It is also aimed at providing recommendations to successfully transfer and access data to/from other companies. The framework should be developed in close consultation with companies and stakeholders to ensure that their needs are considered, and to learn from and build on their experiences.

Considering that technical barriers to data sharing have been identified in previous research and in this study, the European Commission is encouraged to [support the development of data interoperability and standards](#) that enable data sharing and re-use in business-to-business relations.

Finally, the European Commission should [fund projects](#) that support companies to actively contribute to building a European data economy. Companies from different sizes (including SMEs) need financial support to create the necessary conditions to engage in B2B data sharing.





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