



FAIRMUSE

Defining Fairness in the Digital Music Industry: Perspectives from Music Industry Professionals

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Understanding and addressing digital inequalities
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Introduction

Objective: Explore the **perceptions and understandings** regarding fairness among music industry professionals.

“We still need to improve our understanding of the normative nature of fairness, including how it is defined, contested, and mobilised by different actors (Dinnisen et al., 2022, p. 6)”.

Literature Gap: Existing scholarship (Morris 2020, Antal et al. 2021, Hesmondhalgh, 2021, Henry et al. 2024, ...) has shed light on the economic, technological and structural **dimensions of inequality in the music streaming era**. Limited understanding of how **fairness** is perceived by industry actors, especially in the context of MSS; lack of a **grounded perspective** that combines conceptual analysis with real-world experiences and perceptions of stakeholders.

Political sociological approach: Investigating professionals' perceptions is crucial to capture the ideational layers through which **fairness acquires meaning and policy relevance** in today music governance. From this perspective, fairness is a source of legitimacy and site of struggle. Approaching fairness as an essentially **contested concept** helps explain why different actors mobilise the same term to support divergent claims about responsibility, value, and policy.

Methodology

Mixed-method approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data collection

- The key component of data collection involved **22 in-depth, semi-structured interviews** with a **diverse group of stakeholders in the music industry**, including authors, composers, songwriters, performers, representatives from CMOs, streaming services and record labels. Interviews were conducted in English, both in person and online, from December 2023 to June 2024.
- An online **survey** was also distributed across several European countries to gather insights from music professionals about their perceptions towards fairness. Online survey active from end April to mid-September 2024 and available in 6 languages; 360 recorded responses.
- Balanced sample in terms of **gender** (71.3% male and 26.1% female respondents), **age** (one-third of the participants were under 45 years old, and another one-third of the participants were over 55 years old), 19 European **nationalities**, **professional roles** (67% identified themselves as composers, authors, or songwriters, followed by Music Business Experts (50%) and performers (43%) in a multiple choice question)

The survey and interview data offer a cross-level analysis that combines a meso-perspective on industry trends with in-depth, nuanced insights from individual stakeholders.

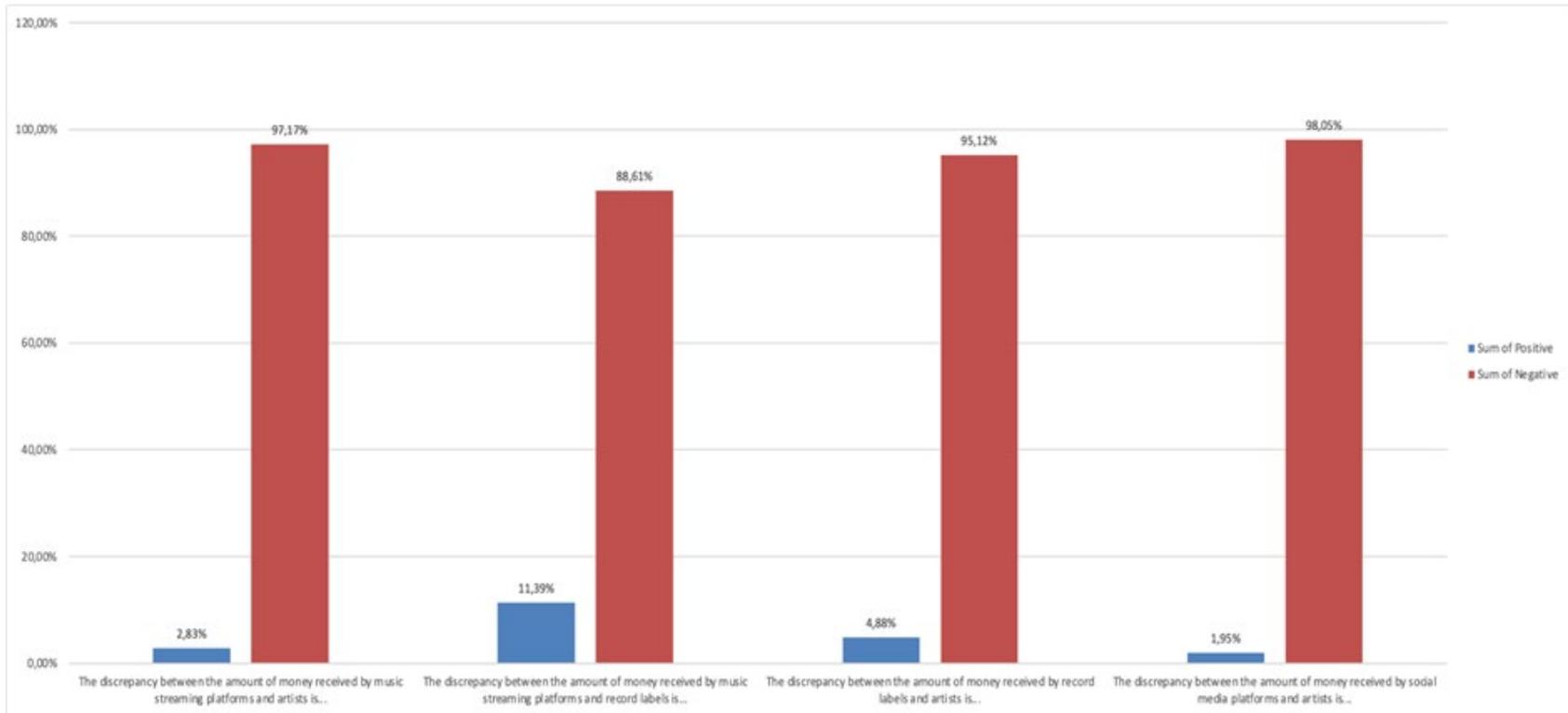
Findings

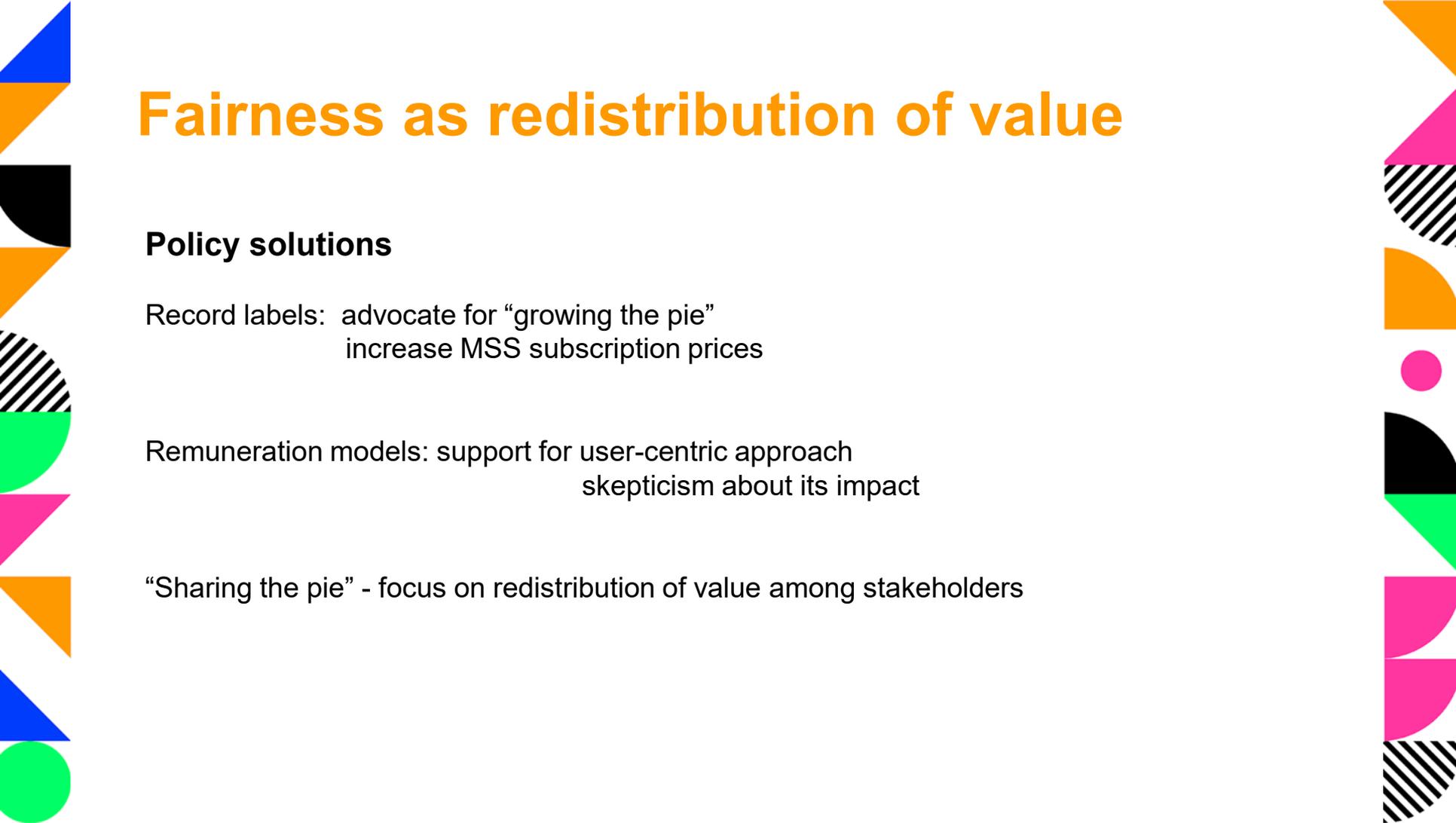
Fairness as redistribution of value

Problem

- Decrease in the value of music: abundance of content
MSS subscription prices
- Unequal distribution of revenues among stakeholders
MSS and major record labels perceived as capturing a disproportionate share

Perceptions of financial discrepancies in the music industry



The slide features decorative geometric shapes in blue, orange, black, green, and pink along the left and right margins. On the left, there are triangles and a circle. On the right, there are triangles, a circle, and a semi-circle, some with black and white diagonal stripes.

Fairness as redistribution of value

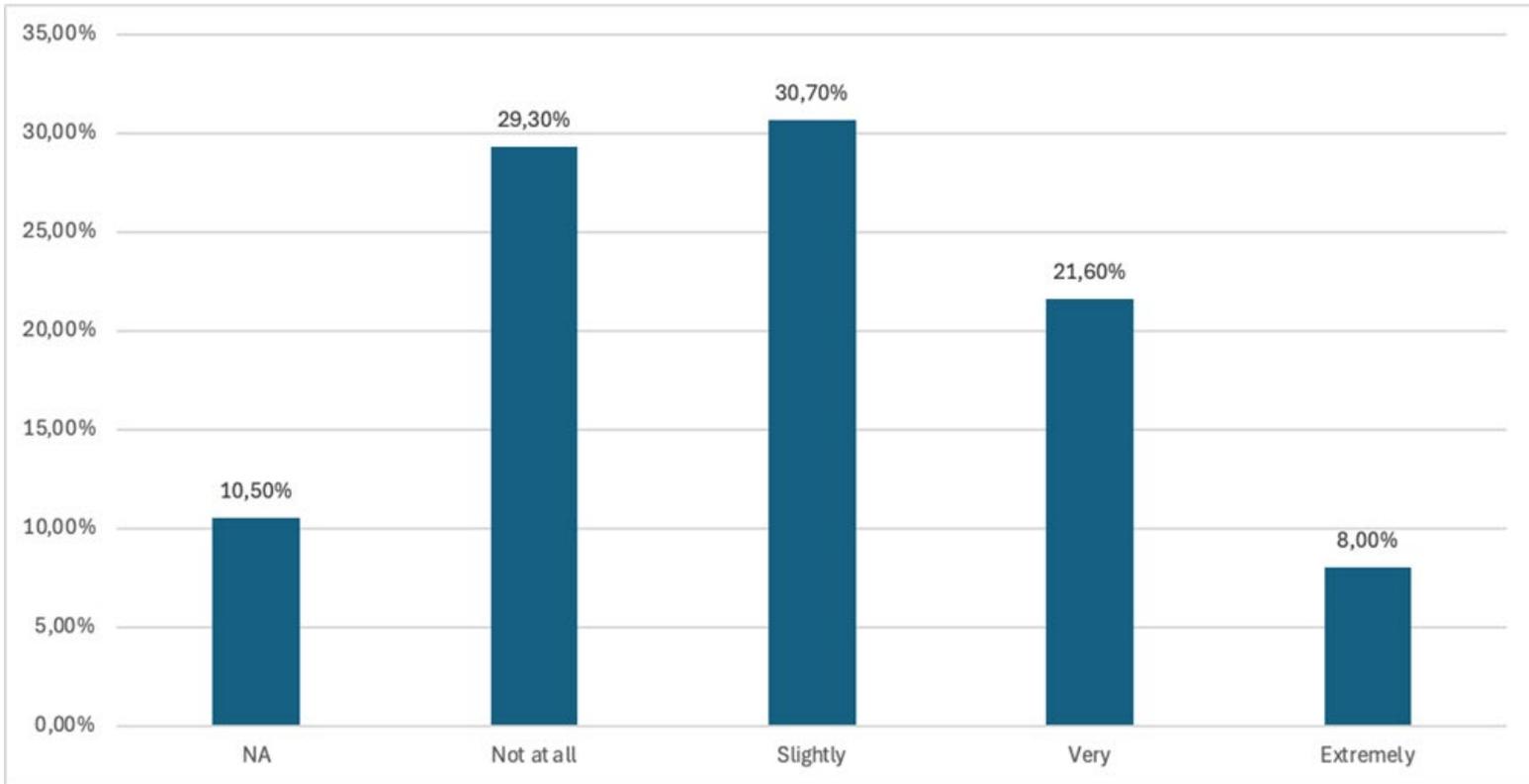
Policy solutions

Record labels: advocate for “growing the pie”
increase MSS subscription prices

Remuneration models: support for user-centric approach
skepticism about its impact

“Sharing the pie” - focus on redistribution of value among stakeholders

Increasing subscription fees could lead to fairer remuneration for artists



Fairness as a balance of power

Problem

- Asymmetric capacity to shape industry deals

MSS and major record labels
Ex: Deezer remuneration model

- Market concentration
diminish negotiation power of stakeholders

Fairness as a balance of power

Policy solutions

- Regulation

 - Transparency obligation
disclosure of deals between MSS and record labels

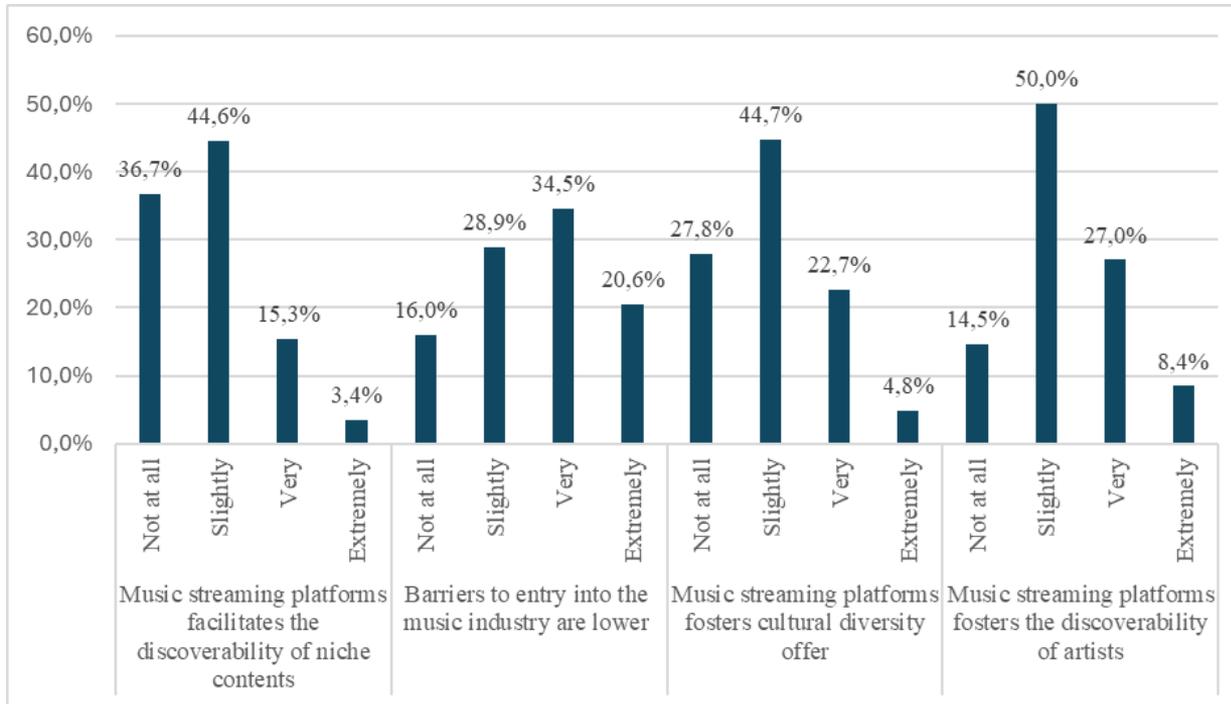
- Renegotiate old deals

Fairness as equality of opportunity

Problem

- Visibility at MSS
MSS lower market barriers to entry
- Opaque recommender systems
perceived as producing inequalities of exposure
constraining cultural diversity

Impact of music streaming platform on market barriers and diversity

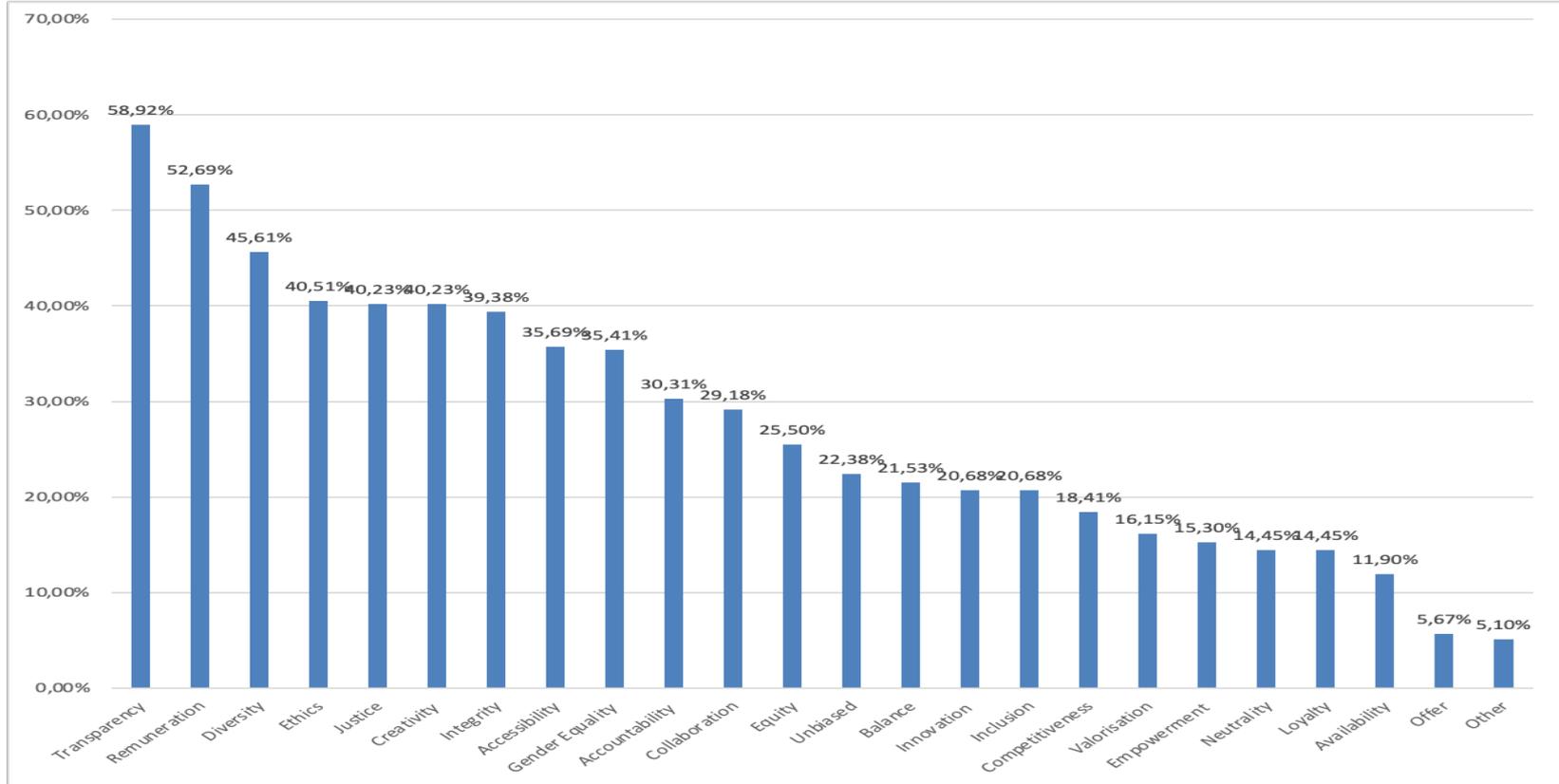


Fairness as equality of opportunity

Policy solutions

- Increase transparency on MSS recommender system
MSS argue for competitive advantage
- Quota: divided opinions
- European music Observatory
- Supporting artist to promote culture diversity

Results/fairness-associated terms



Conclusion

Conclusion

Fairness

- Three key narratives: fairness as (i) redistribution of value, as (ii) balance of power, and as (iii) equality of opportunity
 - Three key interconnected elements: Remuneration, Transparency, and Diversity
 - The analysis shows that fairness is not a neutral notion but a conflictual idea that reflects long-standing tensions within the sector.
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- Several avenues for future research
 - Spectrum of principles that encompass economic, social, and cultural dimensions
 - Recognising these dynamics is essential not only to understand how fairness is debated but also to grasp how it may shape the future trajectory of music/cultural policy and platform regulation in Europe.

A close-up photograph of a hand hovering just above a DJ mixer. The scene is illuminated with vibrant blue and purple light, with glowing red and blue rings around the mixer's platters. The background is dark and out of focus, suggesting a nightclub or stage environment.

**Do you have
questions?**

Thank you!

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