

# 4 Community relations in the first year of COVID-19

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COVID-19 has profoundly affected how people spend their time, how they relate to one another and their institutions, and how safe they are and feel. Social distancing multiplied and compounded feelings of loneliness and lack of connectedness during the first year of the pandemic. Working conditions in 2020 (including telework and contact restrictions in work locations outside the home) have worn people out. In addition, household and care tasks have multiplied. While overall crime levels (bar domestic violence) and road deaths have declined up to now amidst lockdowns, new types of cybercrime have emerged, and homicide rates are up in a few countries. Voter turnout in the first year of the pandemic was, for the most part, not held back as governments adapted special voting arrangements but a large share of the population feels increasingly left out of society.

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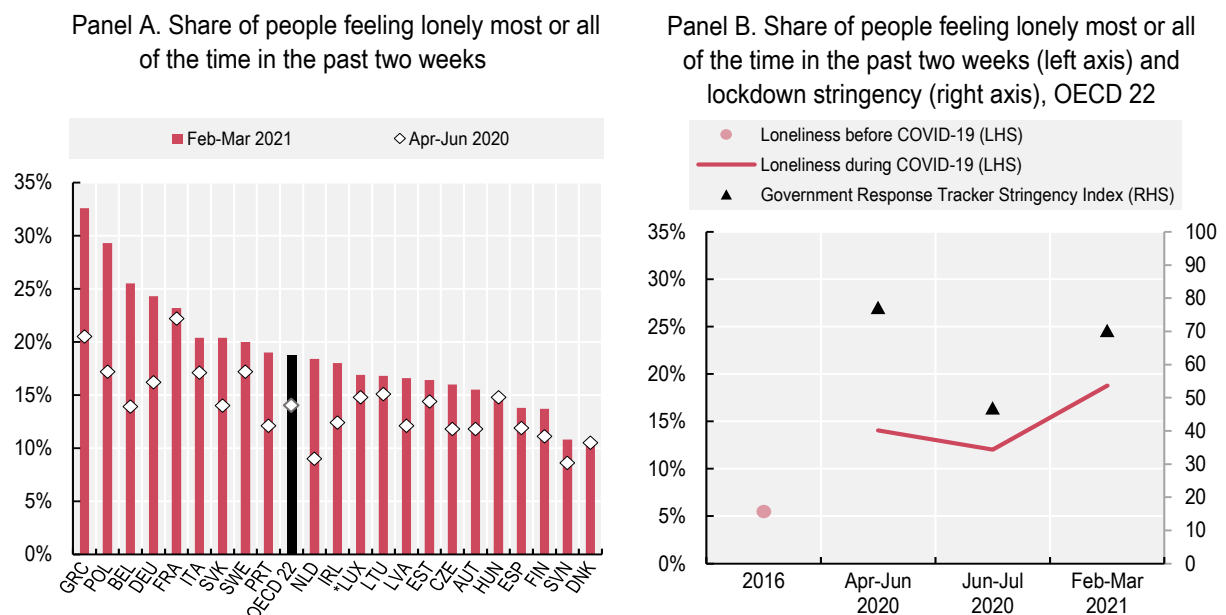
## 4.1. Social connections

*Limited social contact during the pandemic has left many feeling lonely...*

**Feelings of loneliness have been compounded over the first year of the pandemic.** Between April and the beginning of June 2020, 1 in 7 respondents in European OECD countries, the majority of which implemented the first wave of lockdowns in that period, stated they felt lonely most or all of the time in the past two weeks – this share rose to almost 1 in 5 people by early 2021 (Figure 4.1, Panel A). When asked the same question in 2016, only 5.5% of respondents – less than one-third of the 2021 level – felt lonely (Eurofound, 2018<sup>[1]</sup>).<sup>1</sup> Countries with official data confirm this pattern: In Germany, different measures of social isolation between April-June 2020 at least doubled compared to 2017, and further intensified by January-February 2021 (Figure 4.2). And while there is no comparable pre-COVID data available in Great Britain, feelings of loneliness increased there too over the course of the first year of the pandemic: in the period October 2020-February 2021, 7.2% of the adult population said they often or always felt lonely, compared to 5% in April-May 2020 (ONS, 2021<sup>[2]</sup>) (Box 4.1).

**Figure 4.1. Despite a temporary decline over the summer, loneliness increased during the multiple lockdowns**

Loneliness and lockdown stringency in European OECD countries, 2016, Apr-Jun 2020 - Feb-March 2021

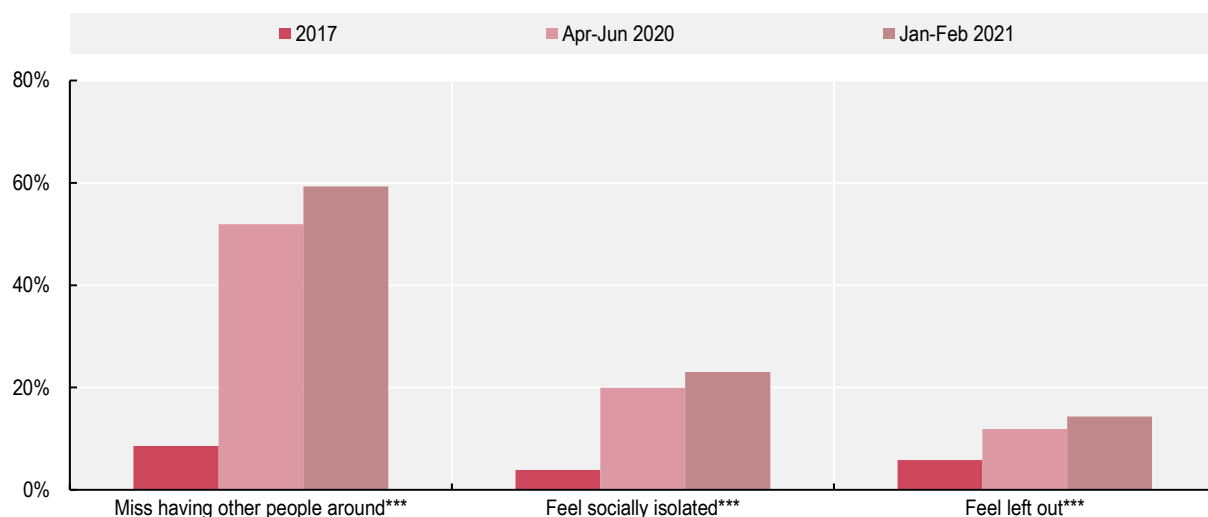


*Note:* In both panels, the OECD average includes only those 22 countries shown in Panel A. Changes in outcomes between April-June 2020 and February-March 2021 are significant at the 5% level for Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands, OECD 22, Poland, Portugal and the Slovak Republic. Refer to Box 2.1 for methodological details on the Living, working and COVID-19 survey. In Panel A, \* denotes countries with between 301 and 500 observations for at least one time period. More than 500 observations are available for all other countries. In Panel B, the stringency index by the University of Oxford Coronavirus Government Response Tracker considers containment and closure policies (closing of schools, universities, workplaces, cancellation of public events, limits on private gatherings, stay-at-home orders, restrictions on internal movement and international travel). A higher score (0-100) indicates higher strictness and more universal policy targeting. *Source:* Eurofound (2018<sup>[1]</sup>), *European Quality of Life Survey 2016*, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2017/fourth-european-quality-of-life-survey-overview-report>; Eurofound (n.d.<sup>[3]</sup>), *Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey* (database), <http://eurofound.link/covid19data>; and University of Oxford (n.d.<sup>[4]</sup>), *Coronavirus Government Response Tracker* (database), <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/research-projects/coronavirus-government-response-tracker>.

**Official regulations limiting social contact are directly linked to loneliness, but feelings of loneliness have remained elevated even when restrictions were eased for a time.** In European OECD countries, loneliness temporarily declined in June-July 2020, alongside the strictness of government containment measures as governments moved out of lockdown over the summer (Figure 4.1, Panel B). Loneliness levels nevertheless remained more than double compared to double compared to 2016. In New Zealand, 3.8% of the population said they felt lonely most or all of the time after the first lockdown in June 2020, a similar level as in 2018 (StatsNZ, 2020<sup>[5]</sup>) (Box 4.1). However, 1 in 5 people continued to feel lonely at least some of the time in the past month (in 2018, 1 in 6 felt this way), and this remained stable through to the March 2021 quarter (StatsNZ, n.d.<sup>[6]</sup>; StatsNZ, 2020<sup>[5]</sup>; Stats NZ, 2021<sup>[7]</sup>) (Box 4.1).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, although official restrictions on contact were lifted, people continued to limit their interactions with others, teleworked, and were prevented from seeing family members living abroad due to travel restrictions. For instance, 45.7% of employed people in European OECD countries were working from home in June-July 2020, and between April and September more than half of respondents from 16 OECD countries said they were always or frequently avoiding small social gatherings (Eurofound, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>; Imperial College London YouGov, 2020<sup>[9]</sup>) (Box 4.2).<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 4.2. Feelings of social isolation have markedly increased in Germany**

Share of people in Germany reporting that they very often or often ..., 2017, Apr-Jun 2020, Jan-Feb 2021



*Note:* Socially isolated is defined as the share of respondents who say they feel socially isolated very often or often. Categories followed by \*\*\* saw statistically significant (at the 5% level) changes from 2017-2021. Funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). The data can be accessed via the research data centre of the SOEP. Refer to Box 3.1 for methodological details.

*Source:* Kühne et al. (2020<sup>[10]</sup>), "The need for household panel surveys in times of crisis: The case of SOEP-CoV", *Survey Research Methods*, Vol. 14/2, pp. 195-203, <https://doi.org/10.18148/srm/2020.v14i2.7748>.

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### Box 4.1. Innovation: National Statistics Offices are increasing the frequency of well-being data collections through weekly and quarterly surveys

#### Colombia: Social Pulse Survey

In order to capture statistical information during the pandemic, the National Statistical Office of Colombia (DANE) began conducting a monthly Social Pulse Survey (SPS) in July 2020. The SPS relies on CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview) to collect data, capturing around 10 000 respondents each month. The survey is representative of 23 regional capitals and their metropolitan areas. By using a subsample of the existing Great Integrated Household Survey, responses to SPS can be linked to existing information on income and labour market outcomes. Topics covered include multiple well-being dimensions such as household consumption, subjective well-being, trust, child and adolescent well-being, care networks, access to social protection, as well as women's experiences during menstruation (DANE, n.d.<sup>[11]</sup>).

#### New Zealand: Household Labour Force Survey

StatsNZ's General Social Survey (GSS) is the official source of well-being data in New Zealand and was last collected over April 2018 - March 2019. Since the GSS has been delayed until April 2021 due to the pandemic, a selection of well-being questions from GSS was included as part of a supplement to the household labour force survey (HLFS) from June 2020 until at least the March 2021 quarter. Collection of the supplement data started on 7 May 2020, with one person aged 18 or older randomly selected from the household to complete the supplement after completing their HLFS questionnaire. The supplement included a selection of well-being questions on life satisfaction, eudemonia, mental well-being, loneliness, discrimination, interpersonal trust and sufficiency of money to cover everyday needs (StatsNZ, 2020<sup>[5]</sup>; StatsNZ, 2021<sup>[12]</sup>).

#### United Kingdom: Weekly Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

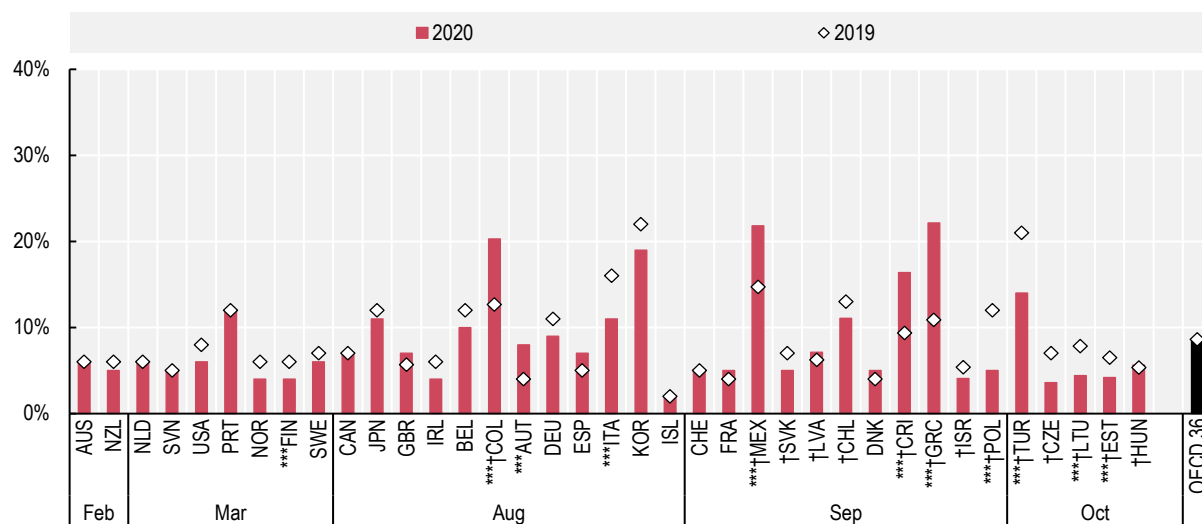
In response to COVID-19, the Office of National Statistics (ONS) adapted its monthly Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) at the end of March 2020 to collect data on the impact of the pandemic on day-to-day life in Great Britain every week. For instance, in the 20-24 January 2021 wave, 6 030 individuals were sampled from those who had previously completed the Labour Market Survey (LMS), with a response rate of 74%. From each household, one adult is selected at random, though younger people are given higher selection probability than others because of under-representation in the survey sample. The survey results are weighted to provide a nationally representative sample for Great Britain, with data are collected using an online self-completion questionnaire. Individuals who do not want to or are unable to complete the survey online have the possibility to take part over the phone (ONS, 2021<sup>[13]</sup>).

*...but COVID-19 might have also led to a re-evaluation of existing support networks*

**Despite the rise in loneliness, a large majority of people in 2020 said they have someone they can count on in an emergency.** Across OECD countries, the share of respondents stating that they have no friends and family to count on in times of need in 2020 remained stable at 8.5% compared to the previous year (Figure 4.3). Only a handful of countries have experienced changes in perceived social support in 2020 compared to 2019 that would be considered meaningful (i.e. at least 3 percentage points), with more people feeling a lack of social support during COVID-19 in Austria, Colombia, Costa Rica, Greece and Mexico, and with social support improving in Italy, Korea, Poland and Turkey.<sup>4</sup> Additional evidence suggests that, during the pandemic, people reached out more to their existing friends and family, and that vulnerable people may have received more support during lockdowns than they would have otherwise: a quarter of people across the OECD stated in September 2020 that they had provided assistance, such as running an errand or providing childcare for friends, neighbours or co-workers without expecting anything in return (Imperial College London YouGov, 2020<sup>[9]</sup>) (Box 4.2).

**Figure 4.3. Feelings of social support have changed little in most OECD countries**

Share of people stating they have no friend or family to count on in times of need, 2019-20



Note: † denotes countries in which the mode of data collection changed between 2019 and 2020 (generally, moving from face-to-face interviews to phone-based interviews). Countries preceded by \*\*\* saw statistically significant (at the 5% level) changes from 2019-2020. The OECD average excludes Luxembourg (no data in 2020) and the Czech Republic (no data in 2019). The 2019 value for the Czech Republic refers to 2018. Countries are ranked by fieldwork start date (earliest to latest) in 2020. Refer to the Reader's Guide for a complete list of Gallup World Poll data collection dates in 2020, and to Box 3.4 for additional information about the data collection methodology.

Source: OECD calculations based on the *Gallup World Poll* (n.d.<sup>[14]</sup>) (database), <https://www.gallup.com/178667/gallup-world-poll-work.aspx>.

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#### Box 4.2. Methods: Imperial College London and YouGov COVID-19 behaviour tracker

YouGov, a global public opinion company, partnered with the Institute of Global Health Innovation at Imperial College London to gather global insights into people's behaviours, experiences and feelings in response to COVID-19. Starting on 31 March 2020, around 21 000 people complete online surveys or are interviewed via the phone each week across 29 countries, including 16 OECD members (Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Korea, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States). The sample frame of the survey is drawn from YouGov's existing online research panel of over six million panellists worldwide and is designed to be nationally representative. Data collection is currently expected to continue at least until the middle of October 2021. Anonymised respondent level data are publicly available (Imperial College London YouGov, 2020<sup>[9]</sup>).

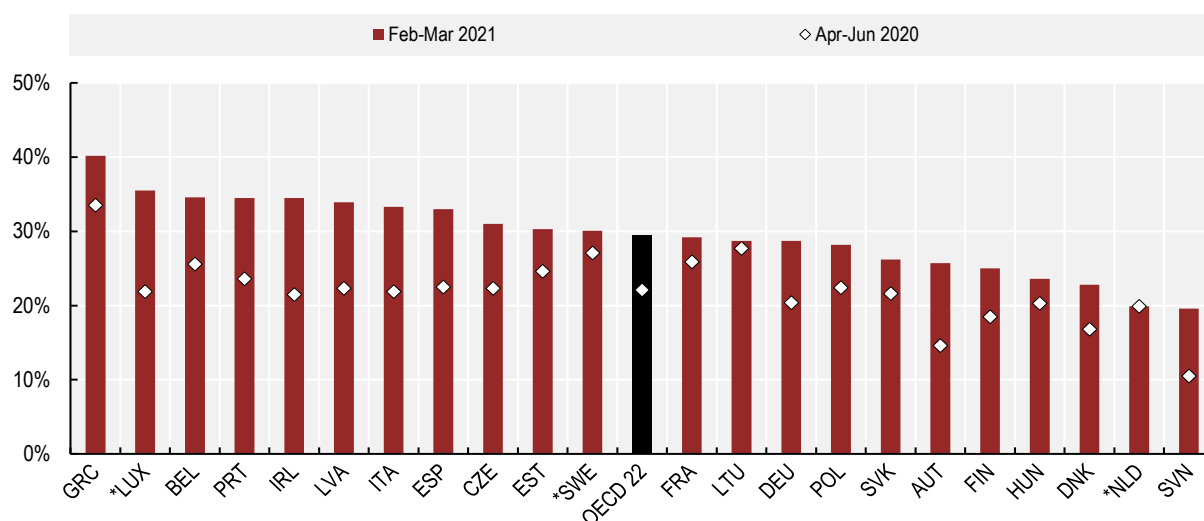
## 4.2. Work-life Balance

*Many workers have felt progressively more exhausted*

**Working conditions in 2020 (including telework combined with school closures and contact restrictions for those at a work location outside the home) have worn many people out.** Between April and the beginning of June 2020, 22% of workers in European OECD countries said they always or most of the time felt too tired after work to do some necessary household chores in the previous two weeks. This share rose to 28% in the 2020 European summer and increased further, to 29.5%, by early 2021 (Figure 4.4) (Eurofound, n.d.<sup>[3]</sup>). In comparison, when asked a differently worded question in 2016, only 20% of respondents in these countries reported experiencing work-life balance challenges, including feeling tired several times a week over the past month (Eurofound, 2018<sup>[1]</sup>).<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, by February-March 2021 fewer workers in European OECD countries reported having to work during their free time at least every other day (15.2%) compared to the level recorded at the onset of the pandemic in April-June a year earlier (17.8%), and slightly fewer regularly worried about work when not working (23.8% compared to 26.5%) (Eurofound, n.d.<sup>[3]</sup>). Overall, people working exclusively from home were less tired at the end of the day than those working at their employers' offices or other locations, and could spend more time with their family. However, they were also more likely to worry about their jobs and continue working after hours (see Chapters 5 and 7). Regardless experiences, preferences for teleworking are high: more than 1 in 3 employed people in European countries (44%) interviewed between June 2020 and March 2021 would like to work from home at least several times a week after COVID-19 subsides (Eurofound, n.d.<sup>[3]</sup>) (see Chapter 2 and 7).

**Figure 4.4. A year into the pandemic, more workers feel tired**

Share of people stating they always or most of the time felt too tired after work to do some of the necessary household chores in the past two weeks, Apr-Jun 2020 - Feb-Mar 2021



Note: The OECD average includes only those 22 countries shown. \* denotes countries with between 300 and 500 observations for at least one time period. More than 500 observations per time period are available for all other countries. Refer to Box 2.1 for methodological details on the Living, working and COVID-19 survey.

Source: Eurofound (n.d.<sup>[3]</sup>), Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey (database), <http://eurofound.link/covid19data>.

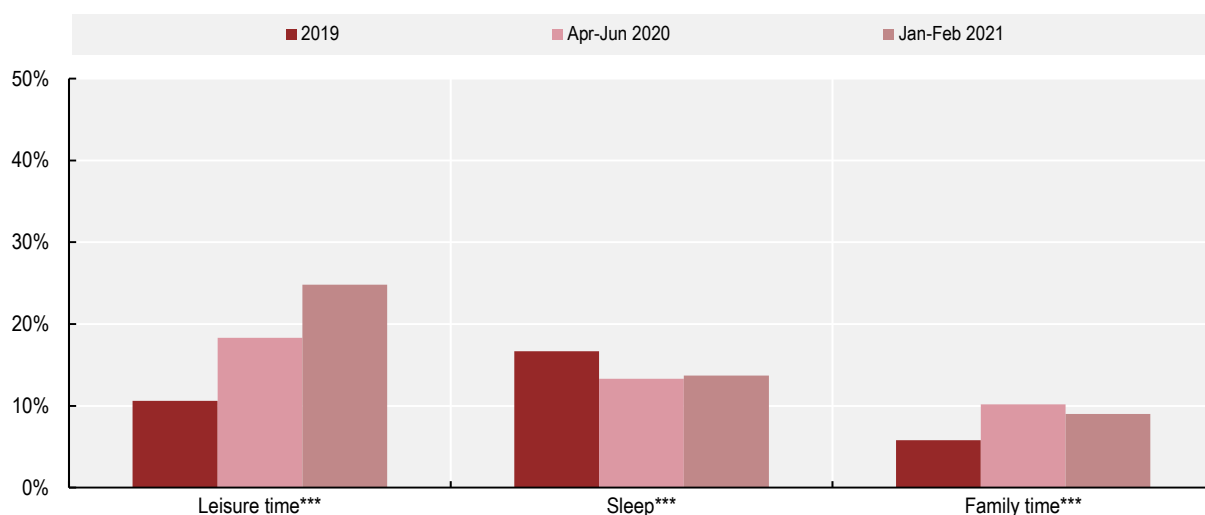
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### Household and care tasks have multiplied during lockdowns

**Whenever more people were at home due to pandemic-related measures including school and day-care closures, as well as interruptions in domestic help services, household and care tasks increased.** For instance, between mid-June and early July 2020, one in six Australians (16%) spent more time on unpaid domestic activities compared to before COVID-19 restrictions, and one in three (36%) of those with unpaid caring responsibilities increased their time spent caring for others (ABS, 2020<sup>[15]</sup>). Similarly, evidence from UN Women Rapid Gender Assessment Surveys conducted in April 2020 in Chile, Mexico and Turkey suggests that both women and men reported an increase in time spent on both unpaid domestic work and care work since COVID-19 began (with stronger rises for women, who have continued to bear the main burden of such work during the pandemic) (see Chapter 7). Evidence from Germany shows that, a year into the pandemic, people were satisfied with how they spent their time in some ways but not in others. While fewer people reported being dissatisfied with the time they spent sleeping in early 2021 (compared to 2019), the share of those dissatisfied with family time nearly doubled, and it more than doubled regarding leisure time (Figure 4.5).

**Figure 4.5. Compared to 2019, Germans were less satisfied with their leisure and family time in the first year of the pandemic, but felt better about their time spent sleeping**

Share of people in Germany dissatisfied with the time spent in selected areas, 2019, Apr-Jun 2020, Jan-Feb 2021



Note: Data refer to those who answered 4 or less on a scale of 0 (not at all satisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied) for each area of time use. Categories followed by \*\*\* saw statistically significant (at the 5% level) changes from 2019 to 2021. Funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). The data can be accessed via the research data centre of the SOEP. Refer to Box 3.1 for methodological details.

Source: Kühne et al. (2020<sup>[10]</sup>), "The need for household panel surveys in times of crisis: The case of SOEP-CoV", *Survey Research Methods*, Vol. 14/2, pp. 195-203, <https://doi.org/10.18148/srm/2020.v14i2.7748>.

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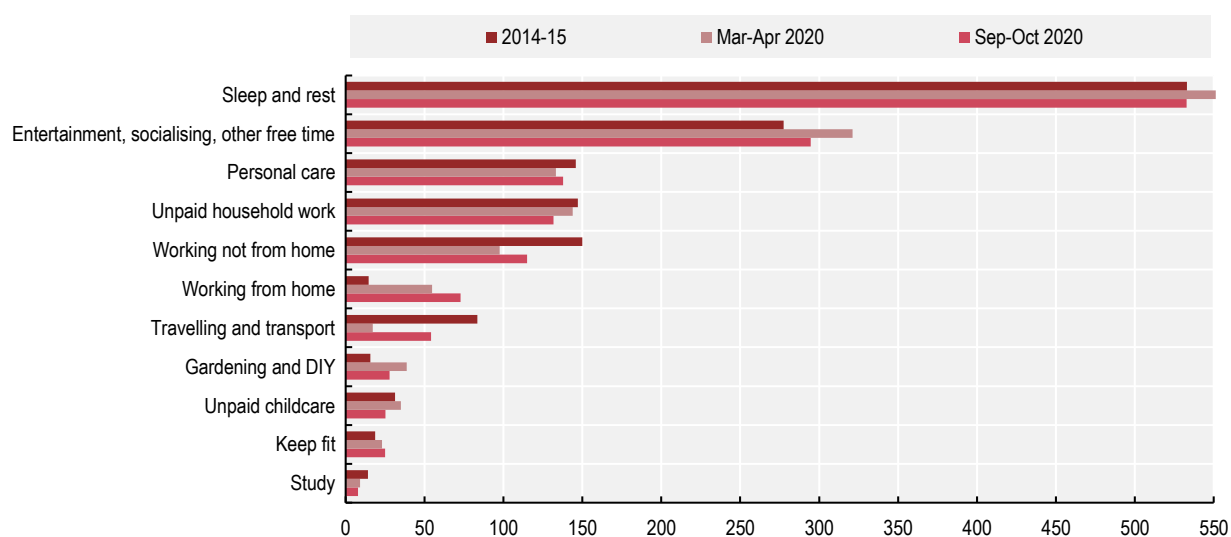
### Not all lifestyle changes are likely to be permanent

**Evidence from the United Kingdom also suggests that, apart from working from home, many behaviours have returned to pre-pandemic levels by the third quarter of 2020.** Time-use data from Great Britain capture the first national lockdown in March-April 2020 as well as further (comparatively less strict) restrictions six months later. They highlight substantial lifestyle changes during the first lockdown:

compared to 2014-15, people spent less time on travel, work outside the home and personal care, and more time on unpaid childcare, gardening and “do it yourself” (DIY) activities, working from home, entertainment and sleep. However, most habits returned to pre-pandemic levels by September-October 2020, as people resumed spending more time with family and friends, increased their overall working time and most likely had finished the longstanding gardening and DIY chores performed in early 2020 (ONS, 2021<sub>[16]</sub>)(Figure 4.6).<sup>6</sup> Indeed, working from home is the only activity category that had not moved back to pre-pandemic levels by September 2020.

### Figure 4.6. In Great Britain, except for working from home, people returned to pre-lockdown habits by September 2020

Minutes spent on an average day per activity for adults aged 18 or over, 2014-15 for the United Kingdom, Mar-Apr 2020 and Sep-Oct 2020 for Great Britain



Note: Data refer to the time (minutes) that people devote to what they identify as their main activity at any given point of the day. Personal care includes eating and drinking, while unpaid household work excludes travel and childcare. DIY refers to “do it yourself” craft and building activities; walking or driving are examples of activities under travelling and transport. Refer to Box 7.2 for methodological details.

Source: ONS (2021<sub>[16]</sub>), A “new normal”? How people spent their time after the March 2020 coronavirus lockdown, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/articles/anewnormalhowpeoplespenttheirtimeafterthemarch2020coronaviruslockdown/2020-12-09>.

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## 4.3. Safety

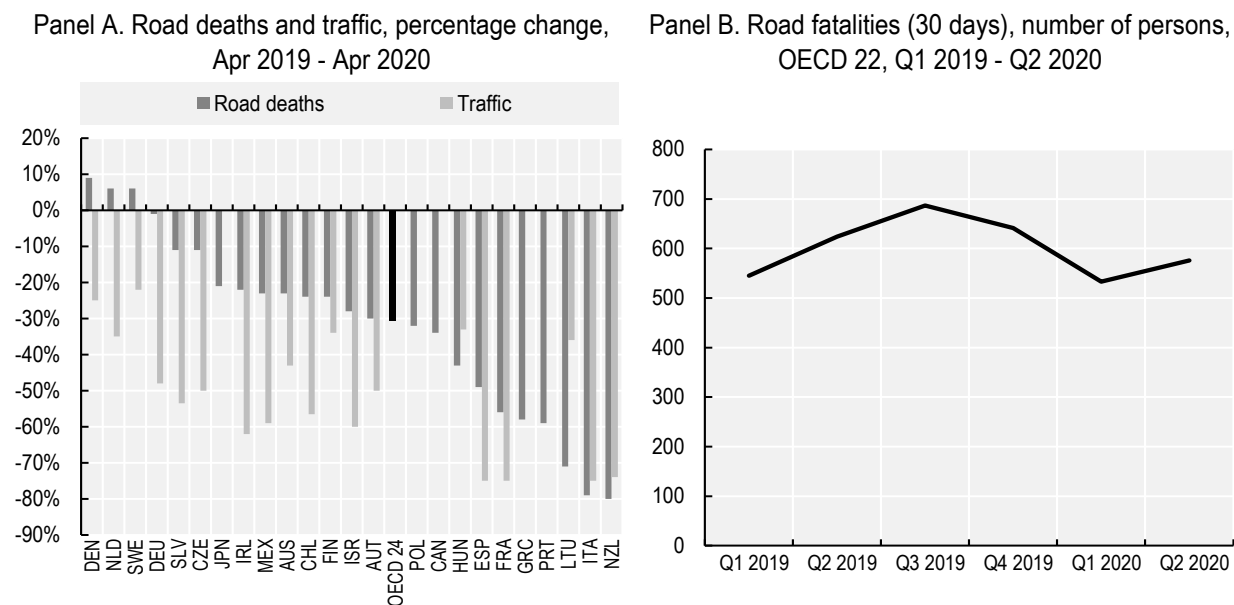
*Road fatalities as well as burglaries, pickpocketing and theft dropped in 2020...*

**With lower mobility, the number of road fatalities fell during the first months of 2020.** Preliminary data show that road deaths in April 2020 decreased by almost 30% year-on-year, while traffic contracted by almost 50% in OECD countries with available data (Figure 4.7, Panel A). Only two countries – the Netherlands and Sweden – did not have severe mobility restrictions in place during the first lockdown. However, some countries, among them Chile, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Greece, Spain and Poland, registered increases in average speed and in the severity of road crashes, possibly due to less traffic intensity during usual rush hours (International Transport Forum, 2020<sub>[17]</sub>). There is evidence,



however, that road fatalities, while below their 2019 levels, started to rise again from the second quarter of 2020 onward (Figure 4.7, Panel B).

**Figure 4.7. In 2020, road deaths declined when mobility restrictions were in place**



Note: In Panel A, the OECD average includes only those 24 countries shown. Traffic figures for Chile refer to Santiago only. In Panel B, the OECD average includes the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Source: International Transport Forum (2020<sub>[17]</sub>), *Road Safety Annual Report*, <https://www.itf-oecd.org/road-safety-annual-report-2020> (Panel A); and International Transport Forum (n.d.<sub>[18]</sub>), *Short Term Indicators* (database), <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=73641> (Panel B).

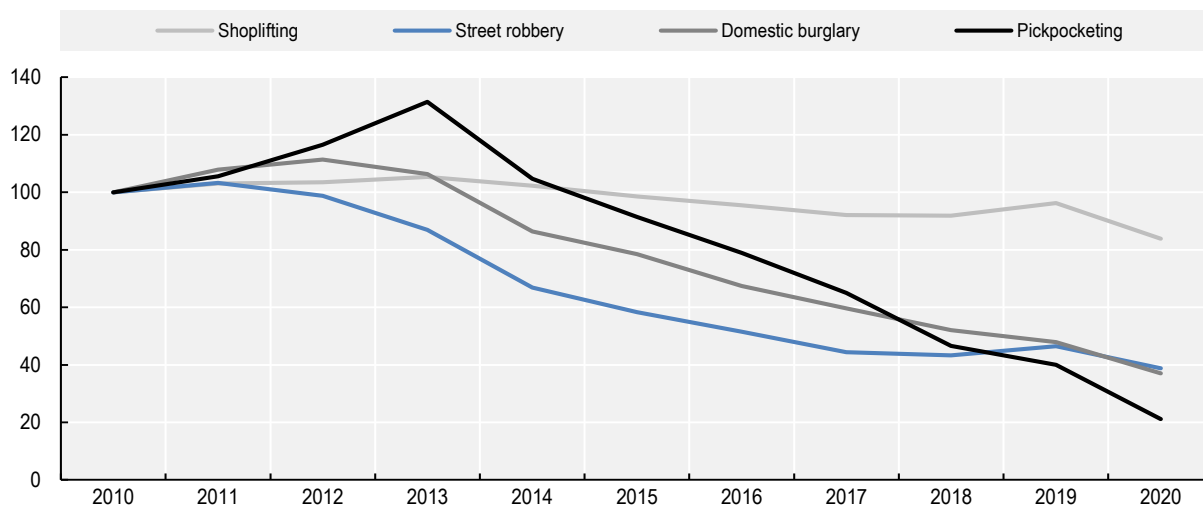
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**Data from a limited number of OECD countries suggest that domestic burglaries, pickpocketing and thefts in 2020 have fallen overall.** Most countries will not publish comparable crime statistics until after the publication of this report, making it difficult to get an overall picture of the impact of the pandemic on various crimes. However, evidence suggests that, with fewer people on the streets, criminal activities typically carried out in groups, outdoor crowds as well as in otherwise empty homes have declined. In the Netherlands, the total number of crimes registered by police in 2020 was down by 2% on the previous year, with pickpocketing (-47%), domestic burglary (-23%), shoplifting (-13%) and street robbery (-7.6%) dropping sharply (Figure 4.8) (CBS, 2021<sub>[19]</sub>). Similarly, New Zealand police recorded 14.6% fewer burglaries and 10.1% fewer theft victimisations in 2020 compared to 2019 (New Zealand Police, 2021<sub>[20]</sub>). In Germany, domestic burglaries in 2020 declined 13.9% year-on-year (BKA, 2021<sub>[21]</sub>). In the United States, the FBI's 2020 annual report *Crime in the United States* shows a 7.8% decline in property crimes and a 9.3% decline in robbery offenses compared to 2019 (FBI, 2021<sub>[22]</sub>). In Israel, 2.7% of adults declared being a victim of theft from a building in 2020, down from 3.5% in 2019 (CBS, 2021<sub>[23]</sub>).

**These types of crime have been especially low during lockdown periods.** In 17 OECD countries, the number of theft offenses fell significantly in March and April 2020, but rose again in June and July (Figure 4.9). In England and Wales, where total police-recorded crimes for the 12-month period ending December 2020 decreased by 8%, this was mostly driven by falls during the periods of national lockdown and mainly concerned theft offences (ONS, 2021<sub>[24]</sub>). Overall, property and contact crime rates are predicted to return to pre-pandemic levels in the medium term, and could increase further in case of economic downturn, replicating a trend observed during other major economic crises (UNODC, 2020<sub>[25]</sub>).

**Figure 4.8. In the Netherlands, shoplifting, street robbery, burglary and pickpocketing were already on a long-term downward trend and dropped further in 2020**

Registered crimes in the Netherlands, 2010=100



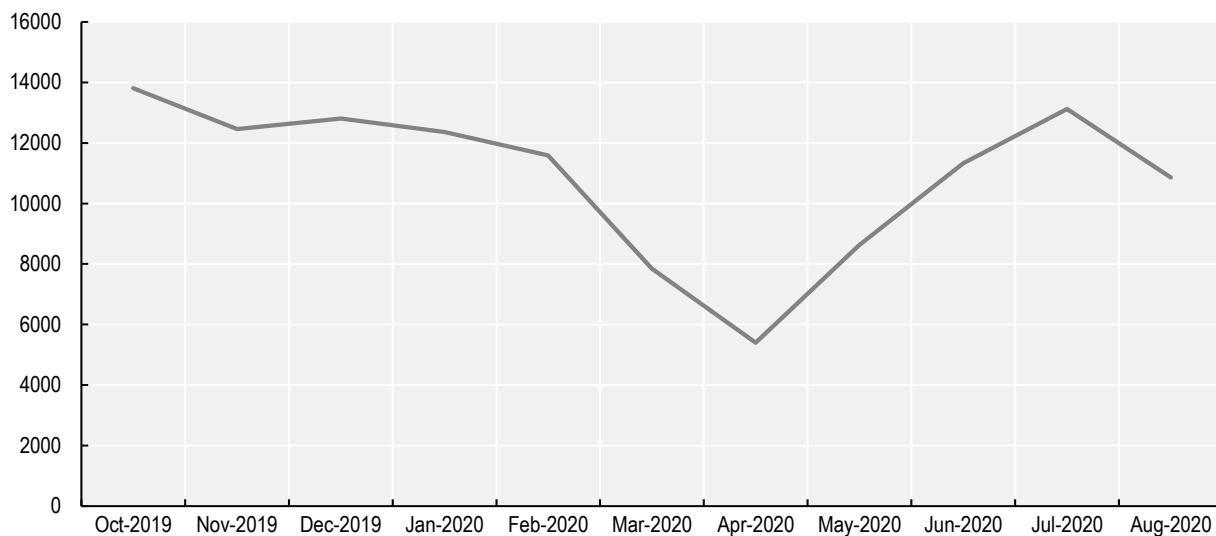
Note: Data for 2019 and 2020 are provisional.

Source: CBS (2021<sup>[19]</sup>), *Sharp drop in traditional crime*, <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2021/09/sharp-drop-in-traditional-crime>.

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**Figure 4.9. In the first half of 2020, theft in 17 OECD countries declined during lockdown periods**

Theft, number of recorded offences, OECD 17, Oct 2019 – Aug 2020



Note: The OECD average includes Colombia, Chile, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic and Sweden.

Source: UNODC (n.d.<sup>[26]</sup>), *Crime during COVID-19 pandemic* (database), <https://dataunodc.un.org/content/covid-19>.

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*... but the downfall in criminal activity does not apply to domestic violence and homicide, and the pandemic provided new opportunities for cybercrime*

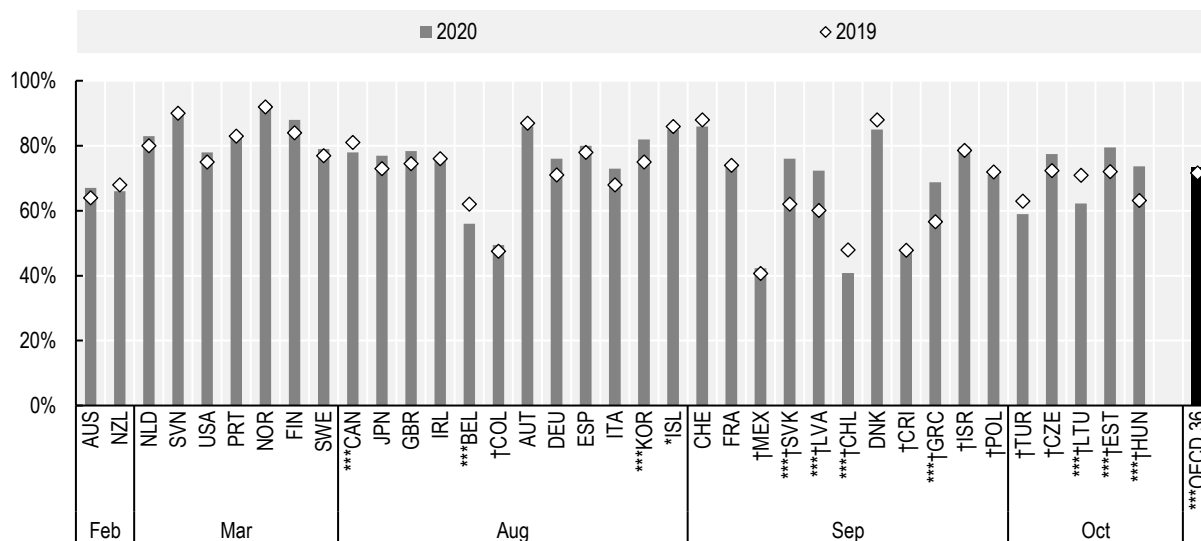
**In 2020, reports of domestic violence have risen in most countries, and shootings and homicide have increased in some.** Lockdowns, isolation, school closures and job losses during COVID-19 have created fertile conditions for domestic abuse, and intimate partner violence against women and girls worldwide has intensified since the pandemic outbreak (see Chapter 7) (OECD, 2020<sup>[27]</sup>). Other data show that in some countries, certain types of violent crime increased in 2020: although rape offenses in the United States were down 12% in 2020 compared to 2019, the FBI also recorded a 12.1% increase in the number of aggravated assault offences and a record 29.4% rise for murder and non-negligent manslaughter (the largest yearly increase since records began in the 1960s) (FBI, 2021<sup>[22]</sup>). Assault victimisations in New Zealand in 2020 also increased by 12.4% relative to the previous 12 months (New Zealand Police, 2021<sup>[20]</sup>). Mexico meanwhile recorded 3 000 homicides in March 2020, one of the highest monthly totals on record (UNODC, 2020<sup>[25]</sup>). On the other hand, homicide rates in European countries did not change much in early 2020 compared to pre-pandemic levels (or even decreased in the short term), while in Colombia there were 32% fewer homicide victims in April 2020 compared with the average level recorded for that month over the period 2015–19 (though the number of victims returned to the pre-COVID-19 baseline by June 2020) (UNODC, 2020<sup>[25]</sup>).

**Like many statistics coming out of the pandemic, crime data must be interpreted with some caution.** First, they refer to reported crimes, and the pandemic might have changed people's willingness to come forward in person – although some evidence suggests that the (property) crime trends described in this chapter largely reflect decreases in the number of crimes committed rather than changes in reporting (UNODC, 2020<sup>[25]</sup>). Second, legal changes occurred in 2020, e.g. more lenient drug laws were introduced in some United States jurisdictions and new family violence offences were added in New Zealand, which influenced what is recognised and recorded as crime. Relatedly, the focus of police work can change recorded crimes: in the United Kingdom, a 15% increase in drug offences in 2020 compared to 2019 is partly explained by proactive police activity in crime hotspots (ONS, 2021<sup>[24]</sup>). Lastly, homicides remain rare events and rates can easily be inflated by single incidents.<sup>7</sup> Overall, people's perceptions of safety in 2020 remained stable compared to 2019 in most OECD countries (Figure 4.10).

**COVID-19 has also led to new opportunities for organised crime in the cyberspace and medical products market.** The threat posed by counterfeit medicines increased dramatically between 2019 - 20, and is continuing in 2021, with organized crime groups taking advantage of high demand for medicines, personal protection and hygiene items (including fake negative COVID-19 test certificates). This led to a record number of fake online pharmacies being shut down by authorities (Interpol, 2020<sup>[28]</sup>; Europol, 2021<sup>[29]</sup>; Interpol, 2021<sup>[30]</sup>). Due to increases in working from home and remote access to business resources, many individuals and businesses who may have been less active online before the crisis have become a lucrative target for cybercriminals employing phishing, online scams and fake news more generally (Europol, 2020<sup>[31]</sup>). The detection of online child sexual abuse material has also spiked at a time when restrictions prevented offenders from travelling (Interpol, 2020<sup>[32]</sup>).


**Figure 4.10. Feelings of safety have remained stable**

Share of people feeling safe walking alone at night in the neighbourhood where they live, 2019-20



Note: † denotes countries in which the mode of data collection changed between 2019 and 2020 (generally, moving from face-to-face interviews to phone-based interviews). \* denotes countries with between 301 and 500 observations. More than 500 observations are available for all other countries. Countries preceded by \*\*\* saw statistically significant (at the 5% level) changes from 2019-2020. The OECD average excludes Luxembourg (no data in 2020) and the Czech Republic (no data in 2019). The 2019 value for the Czech Republic refers to 2018. Countries are ranked by fieldwork start date (earliest to latest) in 2020. Refer to the Reader's Guide for a complete list of Gallup World Poll data collection dates in 2020, and to Box 3.4 for additional information about the data collection methodology.

Source: OECD calculations based on the *Gallup World Poll* (n.d.<sup>[14]</sup>) (database), <https://www.gallup.com/178667/gallup-world-poll-work.aspx>.

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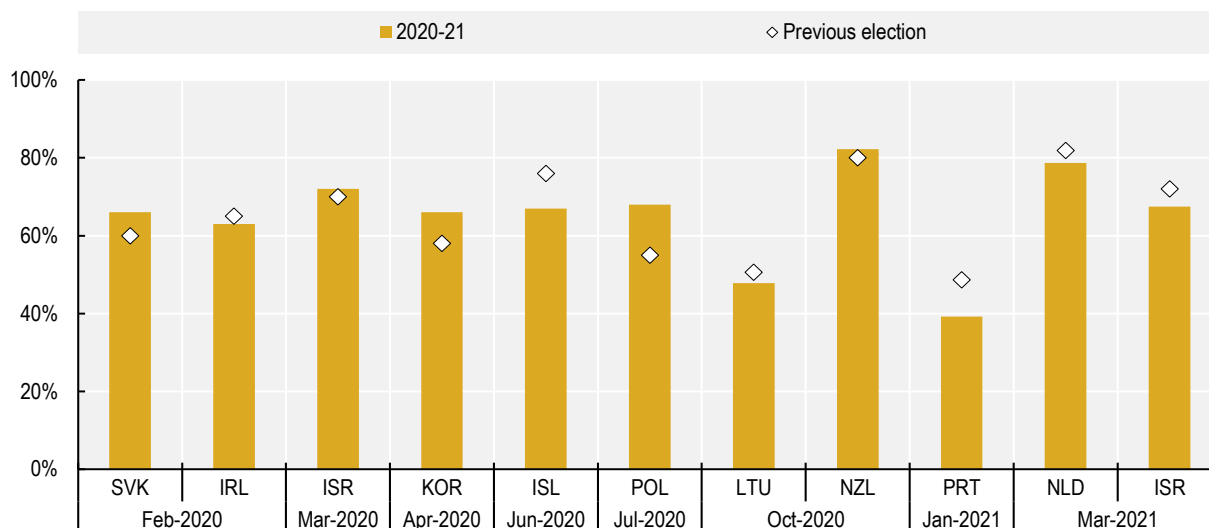
#### 4.4. Civic Engagement

*Voter turnout in the first year of the pandemic was mostly not held back as many governments introduced special voting arrangements, but participation was lower in locations hit hardest by COVID-19*

**Despite the pandemic, people exercised their right to vote in 2020 and early 2021.** With some exceptions, voter turnout in most OECD countries with national elections in 2020 and 2021 was not hindered by COVID-19. While voter turnout in Iceland and Portugal decreased by almost 10 percentage points compared to the previous election, the share of people casting a ballot increased by more than 5 percentage points in Poland, Korea and the Slovak Republic (Figure 4.11). Timing and political context partly explain this pattern: the Slovak Republic, Ireland and Israel (for the March 2020 vote) held their elections at the beginning of 2020, at a time when no COVID-19 cases had been reported in their territories, while voters in Poland and the United States were motivated to cast their ballot by closely contested and highly polarised electoral races.<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 4.11. COVID-19 has not prevented people from expressing their political voice**

Share of votes cast among the population registered to vote in national elections, 2020-21 and year of previous election



Note: National elections refer to presidential elections in Iceland, Poland and Portugal, and to parliamentary elections for the rest of countries shown. Previous elections were held in 2019-2020 in Israel, 2017 in the Netherlands and New Zealand, 2015 in Poland, and 2016 in all other countries.

Source: IDEA (n.d.<sup>[33]</sup>), *Voter turnout* (database), <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/voter-turnout>.

StatLink  <https://stat.link/xd73ck>

**In several contexts, processes for both national elections and referenda were adapted in 2020 to cope with health restrictions imposed by the pandemic.** These included new special voting arrangements and changes in existing practices to reduce crowds and implement social distancing on election day, as well ensuring access for vulnerable groups and allowing people with COVID-19 or in quarantine to vote (Table 4.1). The lessons of these arrangements during 2020 will be significant both during the pandemic and beyond.<sup>9</sup> The only special voting arrangement that was reduced rather than expanded in 2020 and early 2021 was out-of-country voting (OCV) or voting from abroad. For instance, Korea's Electoral Commission cancelled the planned OCV arrangements, disenfranchising about 87 000 potential voters living abroad who could no longer vote by mail, while in Portugal the lower voter turnout in January 2021 can be partly attributed to changes in how to account for voters abroad (Gomes, 2021<sup>[34]</sup>; IDEA, 2021<sup>[35]</sup>) (Figure 4.11).

**While voter turnout in national elections has not generally declined, there is evidence of differential impacts of the pandemic by the location and age of voters** (Santana, Rama and Bertoa, 2020<sup>[36]</sup>). Most of the available data so far stems from municipal elections: for instance, during the March 2020 French municipal elections, the participation rate decreased with the city's proximity to COVID-19 clusters and with its proportion of elderly (Noury et al., 2021<sup>[37]</sup>). In Italy, a 1 percentage point increase in the elderly mortality rate decreased the voter turnout in the September-October 2020 municipal elections by 0.5 percentage points, with stronger effects in densely populated municipalities (Santolini and Picchio, 2021<sup>[38]</sup>).

**Table 4.1. Many OECD countries expanded voting arrangements in 2020**

Special voting arrangements used in 2020 national elections and referenda by country

	Early voting	Postal voting	Proxy voting	Home and institutional-based voting by mobile ballot box	COVID-19 related arrangements in polling stations
Czech Republic				X *	X *
Iceland	X	X		X *	X *
Italy				X *	
Israel	X				X *
Korea	X	X		X *	X *
Lithuania	X	X *		X *	X *
New Zealand	X	X (from abroad)			
Poland		X *	X		
Switzerland		X	X	X *	
United States	X	X			X (Idaho)*

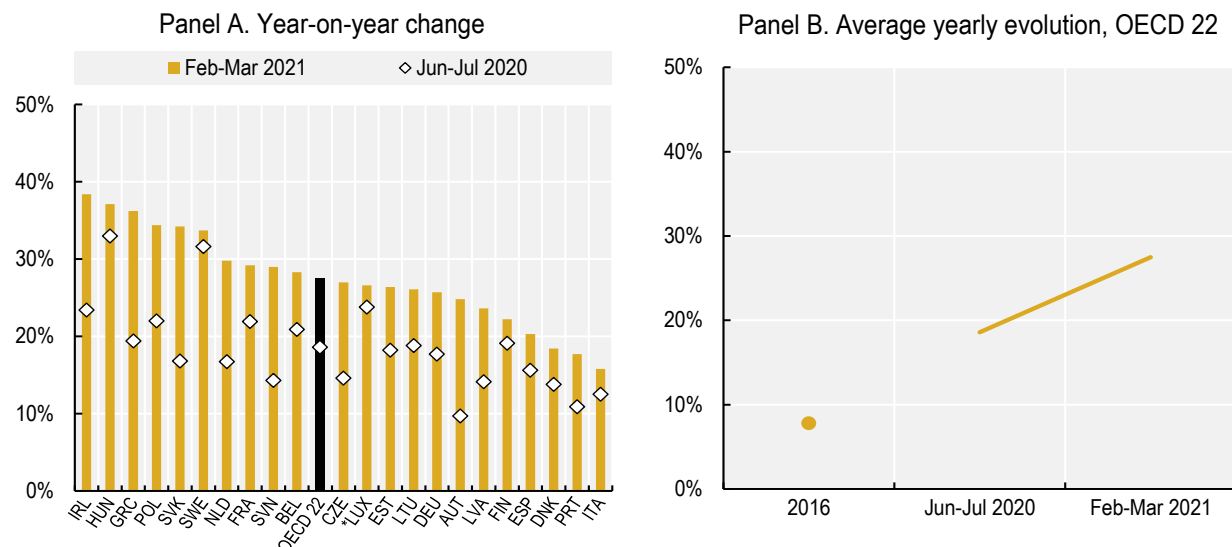
Note: This table refers to the 10 OECD members that held direct national elections and referenda between 21 February - 31 December 2020. \*denotes extension of special voting arrangements for COVID-19 patients. Arrangements in polling stations refer to solutions for in-person voting on election day in and around polling premises as a result of concerns regarding public health or other emergencies, such as reserving designated times or creating special polling stations for voters infected with COVID-19 or in quarantine, as well as drive-through/curb-site voting. Source: IDEA (2021<sup>[35]</sup>), *Elections and Covid-19: How special voting arrangements were expanded in 2020*, <https://www.idea.int/news-media/news/elections-and-covid-19-how-special-voting-arrangements-were-expanded-2020>.

*A large share of people increasingly feel disconnected from society*

**Throughout the first year of the pandemic, many people have been feeling increasingly disconnected from communal life.** Civic engagement is also about feeling able to shape the society one lives in and about having influence on politics. Yet, in June-July 2020, when economies were slowly reopening, almost 1 in 5 of respondents in European OECD countries agreed with the statement that they felt left out of their societies, while a year later nearly 1 in 3 people felt this way (Figure 4.12, Panel A). When asked the same question in the 2016 wave of the European Quality of Life Survey, only 7.8% of respondents in European OECD countries voiced this sentiment (Figure 4.12, Panel B).<sup>10</sup> Already pre-COVID 19, in 2018, on average only 35% of people in European OECD countries reported feeling confident participating in politics, and only 40% believed the political system in their countries allowed people like them to have a say in what the government does (OECD, 2021<sup>[39]</sup>).

**Figure 4.12. Societal alienation increased between mid-2020 and early 2021**

Share of people in European OECD countries agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement “I feel left out of society”, 2016, Jun-Jul 2020, Feb-Mar 2021



Note: In both panels, the OECD average includes only those 22 countries shown in Panel A. Changes in outcomes between June-July 2020 and February-March 2021 are significant at the 5% level for all countries, including OECD 22, except for Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain and Sweden. \* denotes countries with between 300 and 500 observations for at least one of the time periods. More than 500 observations are available for all other countries. Refer to Box 2.1 for methodological details on the Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey. Source: Eurofound (2018<sup>[1]</sup>), *European Quality of Life Survey 2016*, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2017/fourth-european-quality-of-life-survey-overview-report>; and Eurofound (n.d.<sup>[3]</sup>), *Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey* (database), <http://eurofound.link/covid19data>.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The 2020-21 and 2016 data, from the Eurofound Living, working and Covid-19 e-survey and the European Quality of Life Survey respectively, are not directly comparable due to different sampling designs, but similar county rankings lend face validity to the results.

<sup>2</sup> Some caution needs to be exercised when comparing 2020 data from the HLFS supplement (Box 4.1) with estimates produced from the General Social Survey, as differences in collection method, sampled population, reporting periods, and restrictions on face-to-face interviewing, among other things, may all impact on comparability.

<sup>3</sup> These answers about behaviour have to be interpreted in light of potential social desirability bias (i.e. the perceived socially accepted response to questions about social isolation). This implies that rates of actual avoidance of contact might be slightly lower in reality.

<sup>4</sup> Three percentage points are typically considered to be the minimum threshold to denote meaningful change for this indicator between two points in time, as outlined in *How's Life? 2017* (OECD, 2017<sub>[41]</sub>).

<sup>5</sup> The 2018 European Quality of Life Survey question asked in a single question about being too tired after work to do household chores, difficulty fulfilling family responsibilities because of time spent at work, and difficulty concentrating at work because of family responsibilities.

<sup>6</sup> People with a paid job reported a 20% increase in time worked on an average day in September-October 2020 since the April 2020 lockdown. And, as schools re-opened by September-October 2020, parents were doing more paid work on average (up by 54 minutes), while at the same time spending less time on childcare and unpaid housework (down by 51 minutes on average) (ONS, 2021<sub>[16]</sub>).

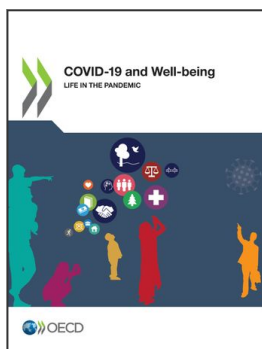
<sup>7</sup> For example, the police recorded a 12% decrease in homicides in England and Wales (excluding Greater Manchester) in the year ending December 2020 compared with the previous year. These latest homicide figures include 39 people whose bodies were found in a lorry in Essex in October 2019 – without this single incident, the number of victims would have decreased by only 6%.

<sup>8</sup> Official data on voter turnout for the United States 2020 elections had not been published as of 26 September 2021.

<sup>9</sup> These also include potential negative effects: for instance, polling place consolidation in Milwaukee during the presidential primary election in April 2020 disproportionately reduced voter turnout of Black people in the city, even when accompanied by widespread absentee voting (Morris and Miller, 2021<sub>[40]</sub>).

<sup>10</sup> The 2020-21 and 2016 data, from the Eurofound Living, working and Covid-19 e-survey and the European Quality of Life Survey respectively, are not directly comparable due to different sampling designs.





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