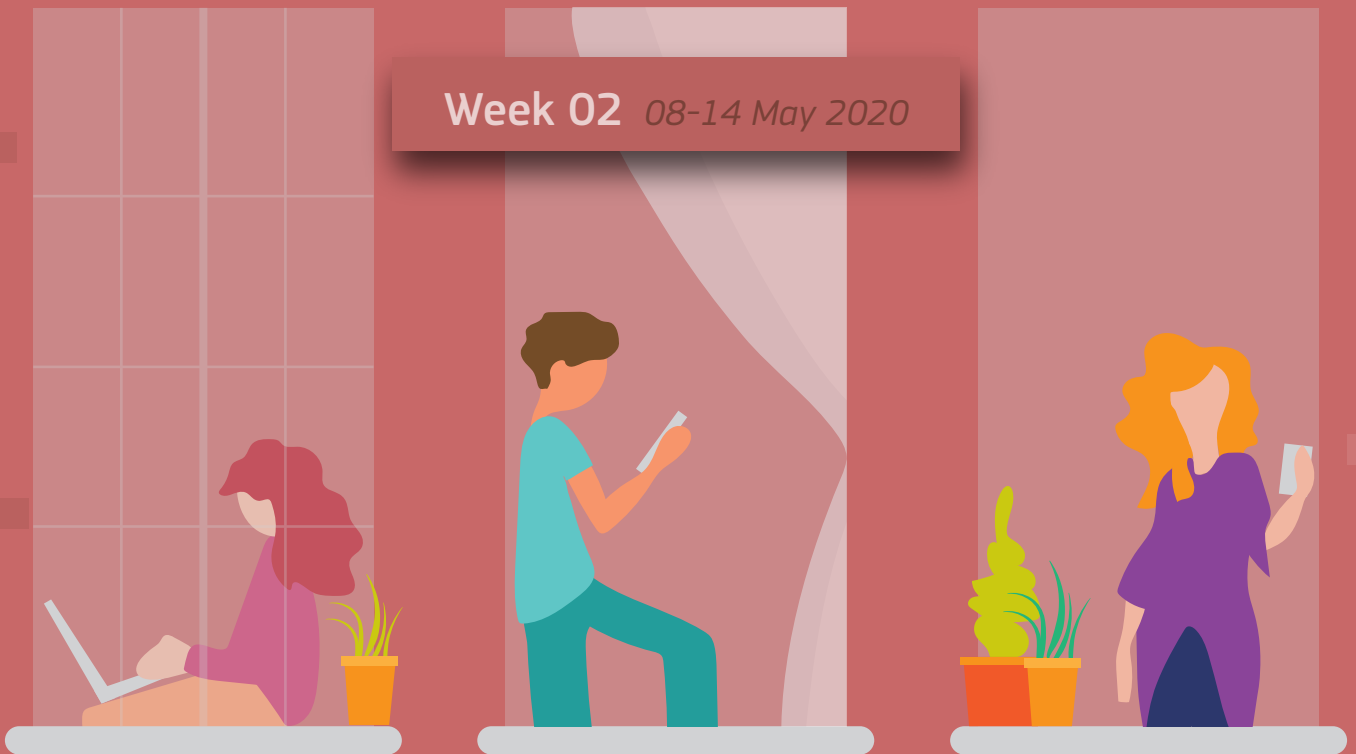




European  
Commission

# Tracking EU Citizens' Concerns using Google Search Data

Week 02 08-14 May 2020



Search



This publication is a report by the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the European Commission's science and knowledge service. It aims to provide evidence-based scientific support to the European policymaking process. The scientific output expressed does not imply a policy position of the European Commission. Neither the European Commission nor any person acting on behalf of the Commission is responsible for the use that might be made of this publication. For information on the methodology and quality underlying the data used in this publication for which the source is neither Eurostat nor other Commission services, users should contact the referenced source. The designations employed and the presentation of material on the maps do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the European Union concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Manuscript completed in May 2020

#### Contact information

Marco Colagrossi  
Valentina Alberti

European Commission  
Joint Research Centre  
Unit I.1 - Monitoring, Indicators and Impact Evaluation  
Via E. Fermi 2749, I-21027, Ispra (VA), Italy  
Email: marco.colagrossi@ec.europa.eu - valentina.alberti@ec.europa.eu

#### EU Science Hub

<https://ec.europa.eu/jrc>

JRC120784

© European Union, 2020



The reuse policy of the European Commission is implemented by the Commission Decision 2011/833/EU of 12 December 2011 on the reuse of Commission documents (OJ L 330, 14.12.2011, p. 39). Except otherwise noted, the reuse of this document is authorised under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>). This means that reuse is allowed provided appropriate credit is given and any changes are indicated. For any use or reproduction of photos or other material that is not owned by the EU, permission must be sought directly from the copyright holders.

How to cite this document:

Alberti, V., Caperna, G., Colagrossi, M., Geraci, A., Mazzarella, G., Panella, F. and Saisana M., *Tracking EU Citizens' Concerns using Google Search Data: Week 2 – 08-14 May 2020*, European Commission, Ispra, 2020, JRC120784.

# Tracking EU Citizens' Concerns using Google Search Data

## Highlights

- ▶ Analysing the evolution of EU citizens' Google searches provides timely insights on their concerns in the wake of the covid-19 pandemic. This week, the report focuses on the four largest EU countries (Germany, Italy, France and Spain).
- ▶ In these countries, health-related worries about the impact of the virus began declining shortly after governments imposed lockdown measures, as citizens might have felt less exposed to the disease while at home.
- ▶ Worries related to the economy (such as Government debt or Eurobonds) peaked one month after those related to health. They have now plateaued in France and Italy and are decreasing in Spain and Germany.
- ▶ Following the easing of lockdown measures, searches for topics related to how to cope with life at home began decreasing. Yet, the search volume remains significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels in all four countries, especially for offline activities (e.g., gardening and recipes).
- ▶ Over the last week, the volume of searches about public transport (e.g., Bus and Train) increased. At the same time, EU citizens' interest in measures to help them overcome economic difficulties, such as unemployment benefits, remains stable.

## Overview

*The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic abruptly changed the life of European citizens. Starting from the first recorded EU hotbed in Northern Italy on February 20<sup>th</sup>, the virus rapidly spread across several EU countries. In this context, Google searches by EU citizens provide timely insights about Europeans' concerns. As about 90% of EU-27 households have home internet access and the number of internet-connected mobile devices is rapidly increasing, Google searches provide a rather detailed picture of the concerns of the whole EU population.*

*Against this background, the JRC created a set of indicators to track the evolution over time of Europeans' worries and reactions related to three key domains: health, economy and social isolation. While worries are defined as the instances that might cause difficulties to the EU citizens, reactions include actions and behaviours enacted to cope with the consequences of the pandemic. Each indicator is the result of the aggregation of several topics (groups of keywords queried on Google Search), allowing detailed analyses of different phenomena that are of paramount importance not only in the midst of the pandemic but also in its aftermath.*

# Weekly updates

Over the last seven days (from May 3rd to 9th), the indicators show that interest in the examined topics (related to Health, Economy and Social isolation) is decreasing compared to the previous weeks. There are, however, two noteworthy exceptions. Following the easing of lockdown measures, people's interest for Travel increased. In particular, the volume of searches over public transport (e.g., Bus and Train) increased. At the same time, EU citizens' interest in measures to help them overcome their economic difficulties, such as unemployment benefits, remains stable.

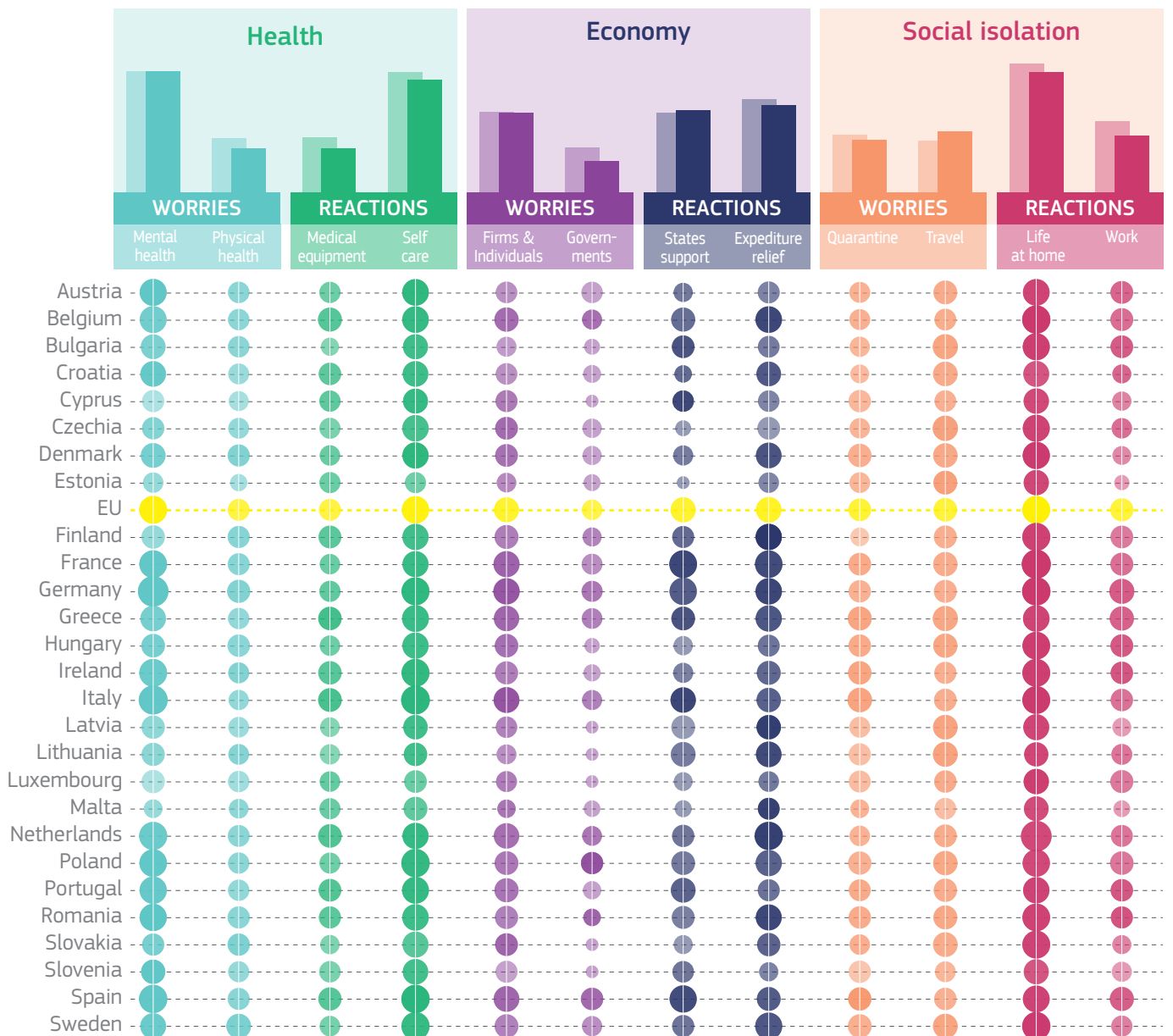
Overall, in all EU countries, interest in Self care and Life at home remains high. The high volume of Google searches for topics related to Exercise and Nutrition (Self care) can be read as a symptom of still closed gyms and restaurants. At the same time, limited live social interactions and suspended cultural activities are still having consequences on people's lives, as EU citizens keep searching for hobbies and cooking advice (Books, DIY and Recipes).

## CHART KEY

**Histogram** shows the difference in the amount of Google searches for each topic

11/04/2020 - 02/05/2020  
03-09/05/2020

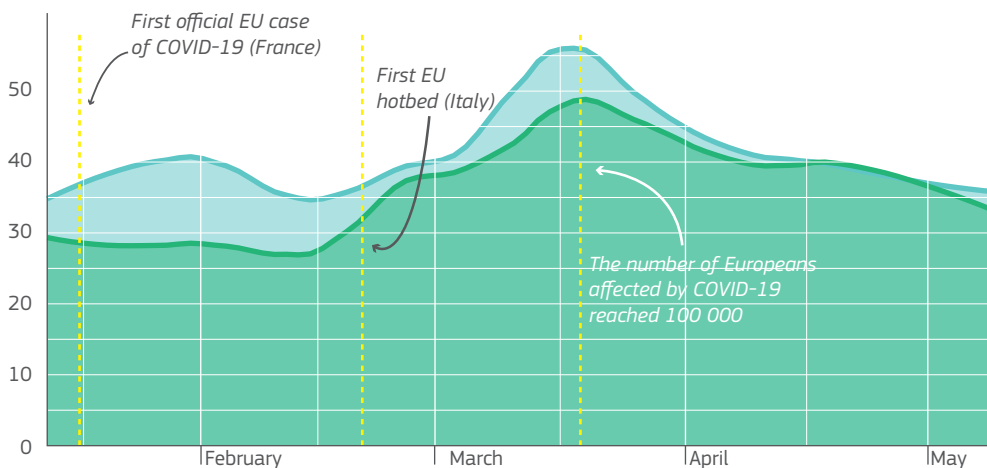
**Bubbles size** shows the amount of Google searches for each topic in each country



■ Overview of the amount of Google searches in the 27 EU countries (reference period 03-09/05/2020).

# Health

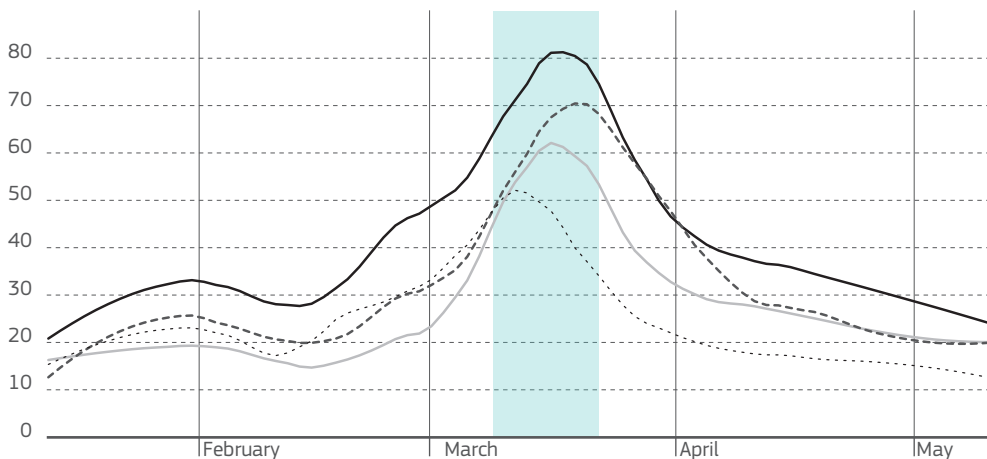
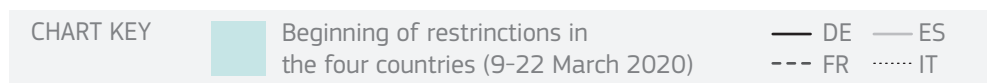
Following the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, Europeans' interest in health-related topics became particularly intense. This domain encompasses worries for physical and mental health, and it captures as reactions changes in lifestyle and habits, such as medical equipment (e.g., searches for dust masks and sanitizers) and self care (such as physical exercises and nutrition).



Trends of interest in health-related issues in the 27 EU countries (from 13/03 to 09/05).

Since the beginning of the year, the volume of searches for worries related to physical health has been rather similar in the four largest Member States analysed in the graph. Nonetheless, differences can be observed as the relative volume of searches started increasing and peaked at different times, following the evolution of the spread of the pandemic. Italy has been the first to show a steep increase, followed shortly after by Spain, France and Germany.

After lockdown measures have been adopted at national level in Italy, Spain and France, the relative search volume for topics related to physical health worries began decreasing. This might be linked with the fact that a higher proportion of the population started to feel less exposed to the disease while at home.



Trends of worries in 'Physical health' issues in the 27 EU countries (from 13/03 to 09/05).

## WORRIES

**Physical health**  
Cough, Immunity, Symptom, Shortness of breath

**Mental health**  
Anxiety, Panic attack

## REACTIONS

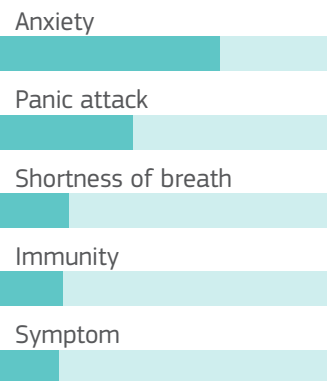
**Medical equipment**  
Antiviral drug, Dust mask, Hand sanitizer, Vaccine

**Self care**  
Exercise, Nutrition, Psychotherapy, Yoga

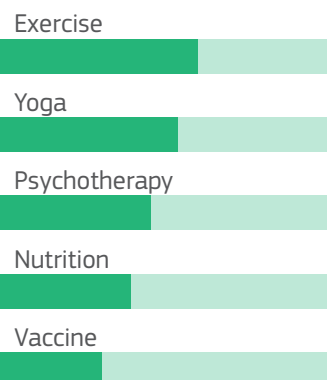
## MOST SEARCHED TOPICS

Here listed the most searched topics composing the health related indicators in the week 3-9 May 2020.

## WORRIES

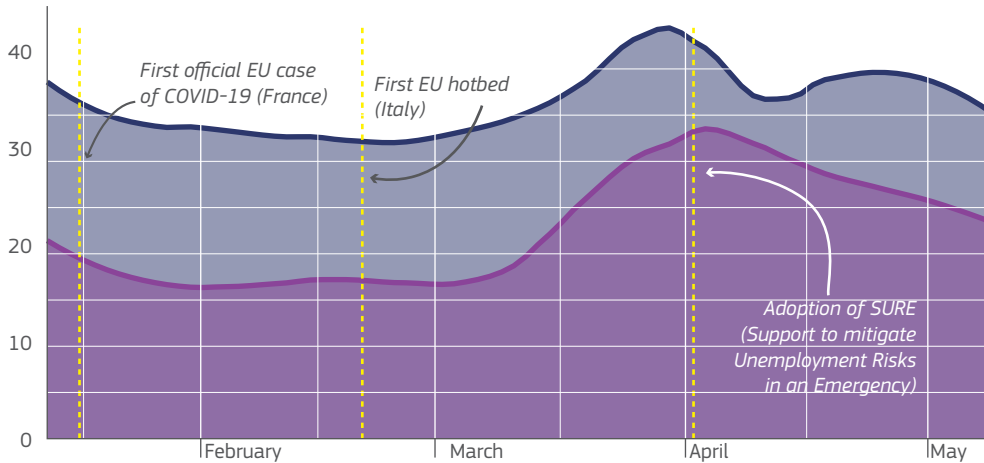


## REACTIONS



# Economy

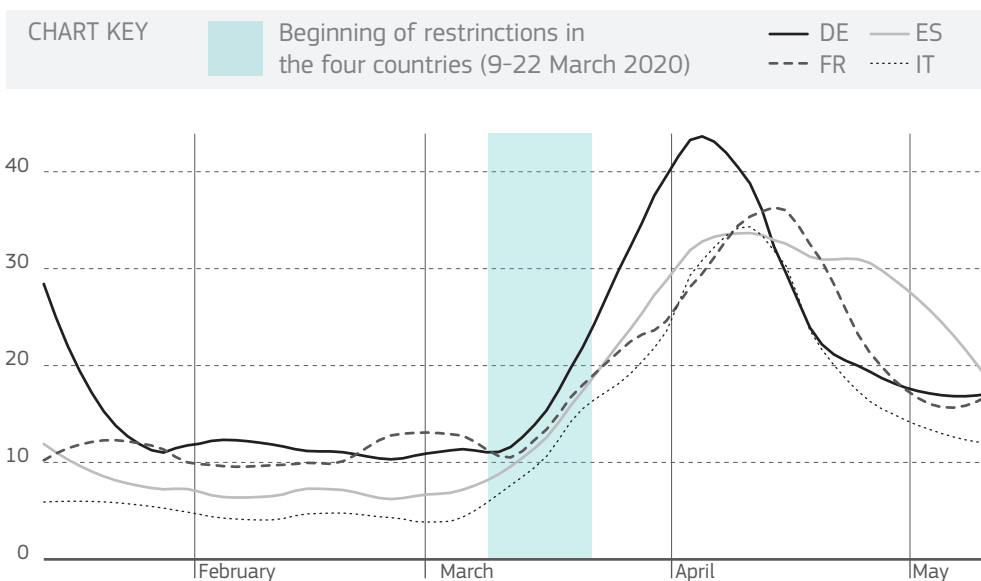
This domain encompasses evolutions in the volume of searches capturing both worries and reactions related to the economy. Among worries, terms related to the economic effects of the lockdown have been included, focusing on the consequences for Governments as well as for Firms and Individuals. Reactions, on the other hand, capture how citizens are trying to get through the crisis either by looking at how to reduce their expenditures or with the help of governments' interventions.



■ Trends of interest in economy-related issues in the 27 EU countries (from 13/03 to 09/05).

Contrary to health-related concerns, worries about the economy of both the household and the country peaked about a month after lockdown measures had been imposed in the four largest EU countries. In particular, the relative volume of searches around topics such as Government debt, the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) and the so-called Eurobonds (the Governments pillar) increased by about 30% from the pre-pandemic period in all four countries analysed.

Nonetheless, differences could be noticed. While in Germany, Italy and France the interest about these topics rapidly declined after its peak in early April, the decline in the interest has been slower in Spain. Further, starting in May the relative search volume for these topics plateaued in Italy and France it is now stabilising at a level higher than prior to the pandemic.



■ Trends of worries in 'Governments' issues in the 27 EU countries (from 13/03 to 09/05).

## WORRIES

### Firms & individuals

Bankruptcy, Dismissal, Unemployment, Layoff

### Governments

Eurobond, European Stability Mechanism, Government Debt

## REACTIONS

### Expenditure relief

Loan, Moratorium, Mortgage suspension

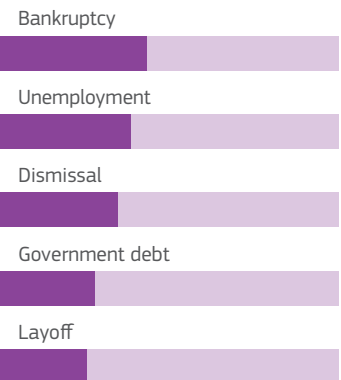
### States support

Subsidy, Unemployment benefits

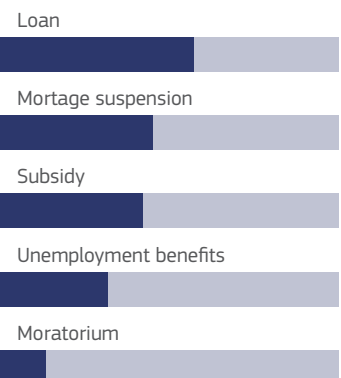
## MOST SEARCHED TOPICS

Here listed the most searched topics composing the economy related indicators in the week 3-9 May 2020.

## WORRIES

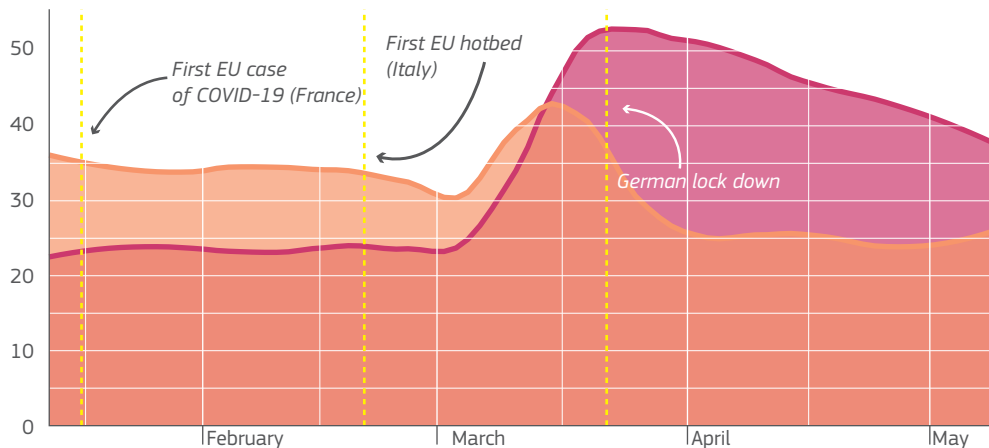


## REACTIONS



# Social isolation

One of the consequences of the restrictive measures adopted in Member States is the social isolation of citizens, who are asked to limit their social interactions. Therefore, this domain encompasses evolutions in the volume of searches capturing both topics related to travel and quarantine expectations (worries) and topics describing how citizens are coping with restrictive measures, in terms of work and private life (reactions). Looking at how citizens have been adapting to life at home, the analysis considers both online activities and offline activities.



■ Trends of interest in social isolation-related issues in the 27 EU countries (from 13/03 to 09/05).

Increase in volume of searches for topics related to Life at home has been first observed in Italy, and shortly after in Spain. In France and Germany the increase started a few days later. While the four countries were in lockdown, the search volume kept growing until the beginning of April. In line with the easing of lockdown measures, it is possible to notice a decrease in searches in mid-April, but the search volume remained significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels in all four countries.

The trend is sustained by searches related to topics such as Do it yourself, Gardening and Recipe. Online activities, such as Streaming media and Online gaming, decreased after their peak in the most acute phase of the pandemic. In particular, Streaming media has now returned to pre-pandemic levels.

## WORRIES

### Quarantine expectation

Lockdown, Quarantine, Social distancing

### Travel

Bus, Flight, Train

## REACTIONS

### Life at home

Book, Do it yourself, Gardening, Online game, Recipe, Streaming media

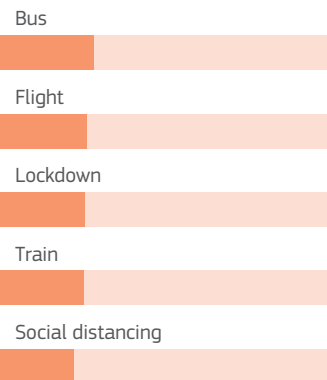
### Work

Telecommuting, Video conference, Videotelephony

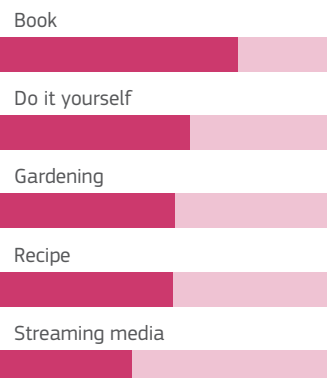
## MOST SEARCHED TOPICS

Here listed the most searched topics composing the social isolation related indicators in the week 3-9 May 2020.

## WORRIES



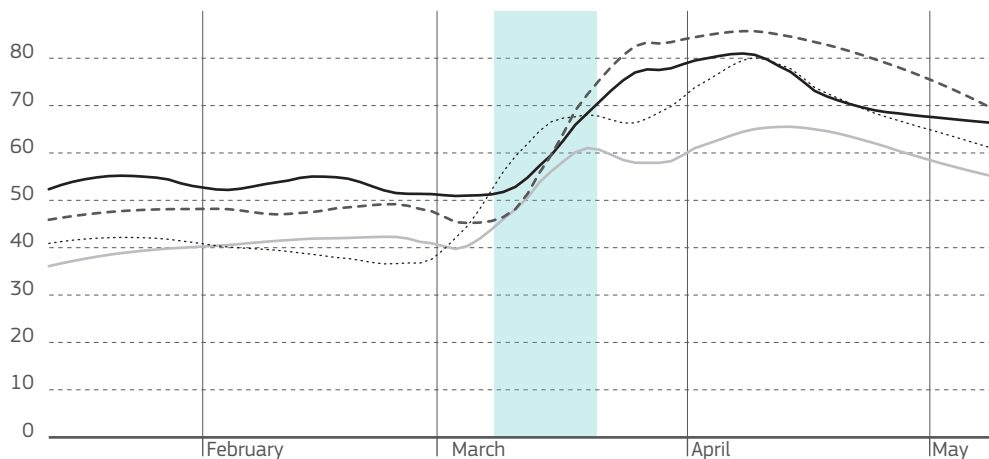
## REACTIONS



### CHART KEY

Beginning of restrictions in the four countries (9-22 March 2020)

— DE — ES  
- - - FR ····· IT



■ Trends of interest in 'Life at home' issues in the 27 EU countries (from 13/03 to 09/05).



## The European Commission's science and knowledge service

Joint Research Centre

### JRC Mission

As the science and knowledge service of the European Commission, the Joint Research Centre's mission is to support EU policies with independent evidence throughout the whole policy cycle.



**EU Science Hub**  
[ec.europa.eu/jrc](https://ec.europa.eu/jrc)



@EU\_ScienceHub



EU Science Hub - Joint Research Centre



EU Science, Research and Innovation



EU Science Hub