

# Tracking EU Citizens' Concerns using Google Search Data

Week 03 15-22 May 2020



Search



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#### 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

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# 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, following the EC Communication 'Tourism and transport in 2020 and beyond' of the 13th of May, the report focuses on tourism.
- ▶ In March, worries about the individual health consequences of SARS-CoV-2 virus, reduced EU citizens' interests towards holidays. Health-related worries decreased following the lockdown measures implemented by national governments and, starting in May, a recovery of searches related to tourism is observed.
- ▶ Early evidence suggests that economic consequences of the pandemic will not be symmetric across the tourism sector. The volume of searches for Booking.com and Airbnb is at a three-year low. Yet, while searches for Booking.com and camping are rapidly recovering, the same does not apply to Airbnb.
- ▶ Searches for flights remain particularly low, albeit there have been weak signs of recovery over the last week. While the volume of searches for flights in April was from 4 to 3 times smaller than the same month in the last year, it is now twice as small. The trend does not, however, suggest that flight carriers will get back to 2019 levels shortly.

## 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 week, few governments began (or planned) lifting some of the restrictions previously imposed to fight the covid-19 pandemic. In this context, physical health worries related to the pandemic, following the trends of the past weeks, kept decreasing. On the contrary, for the first time since the beginning of the crisis, the volume of searches related to Travels (e.g., bus, flights and in particular trains) increased with respect to the last week.

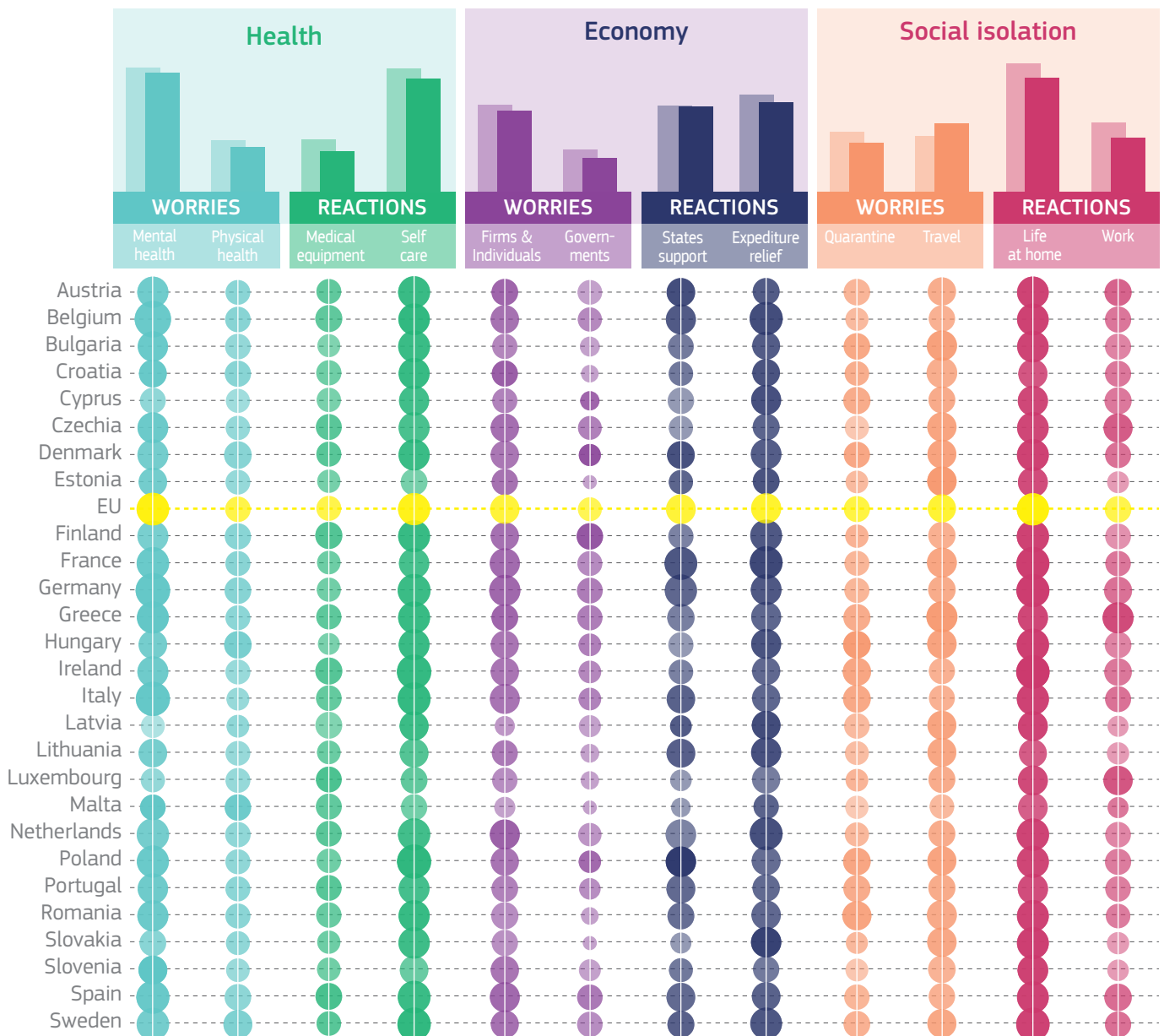
On the other hand, the toll of the pandemic on the economy is still developing. Searches related to state support instruments (such as unemployment benefits and subsidies to SMEs) do not show any sign of decreasing. Further, while worries related to bankruptcies and layoffs (Firms and Individuals) are on a descending path, they remain high compared to similar periods of past years.

## CHART KEY

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

18/04/2020 - 08/05/2020  
09-16/05/2020

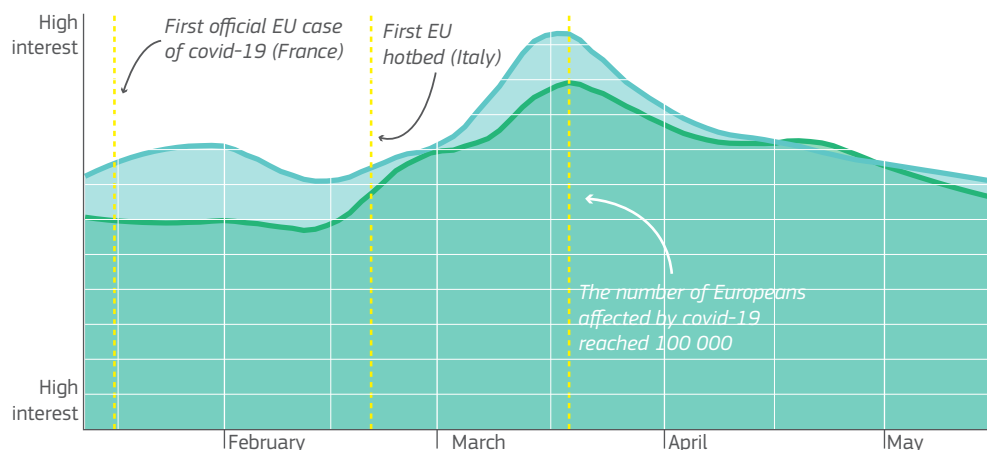
The **bubbles size** shows the amount of \ Google searches for each topic in each country



Overview of the amount of Google searches in the 27 EU countries (reference period 09-16/05/2020).

# 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 16/05).

Starting in early-March 2020, attention started shifting away from tourism-related topics, as EU citizens became increasingly more worried about their physical health. Trends, however, changed towards the end of the month, when, following lockdown measures imposed by national governments, worries related to the health-impact of the virus decreased and the fall in the volume of searches related to tourism halted.

Starting in May, tourism-related queries began growing at a rapid pace. While this evidence should not be overstated, as the relative interest is still below January, which is already among the months with the lower-search volumes, there are signs for optimism. EU citizens are now starting to think about their next holidays.

## 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 09-16 May 2020.

## WORRIES

Anxiety

Panic attack

Shortness of breath

Immunity

Symptom

## REACTIONS

Exercise

Yoga

Psychotherapy

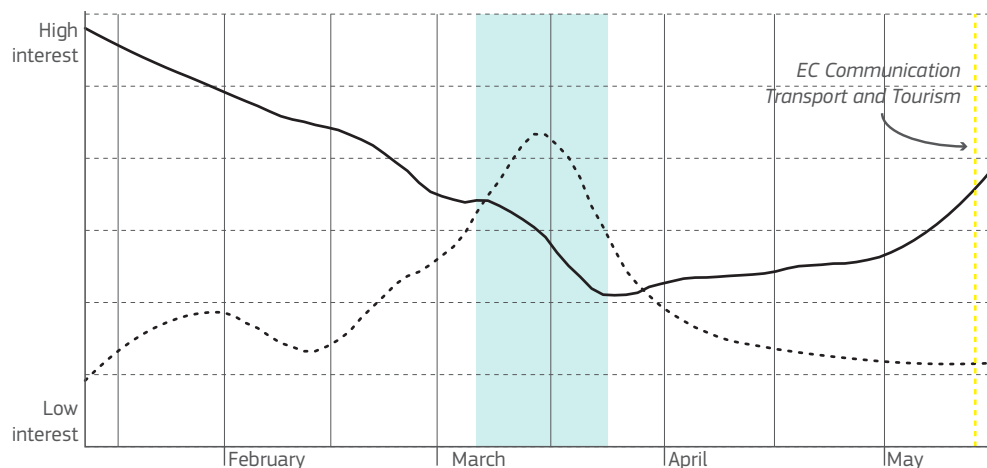
Nutrition

Vaccine

## CHART KEY

Beginning of restrictions in France, Germany, Italy and Spain (9-22 March 2020)

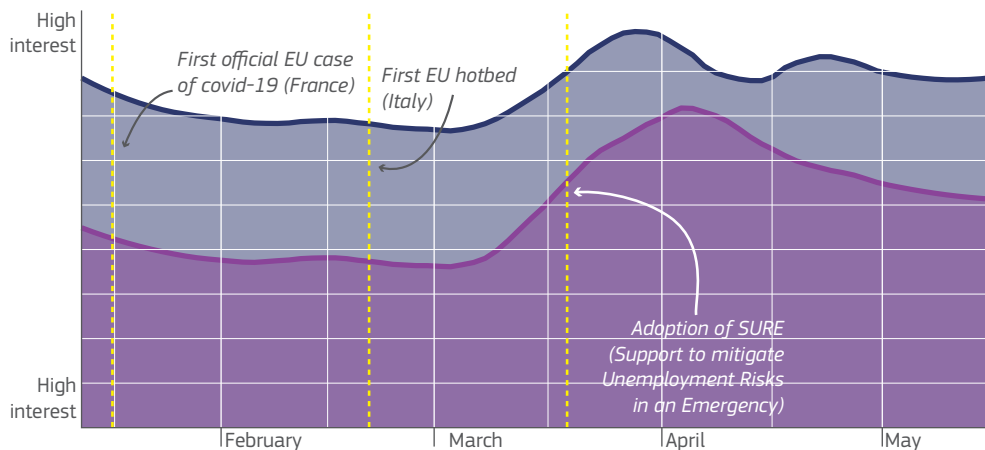
--- Physical health  
— Holidays



■ Trends of interest in Physical health and Holidays in the 27 EU countries (from 13/03 to 16/05).

# Economy

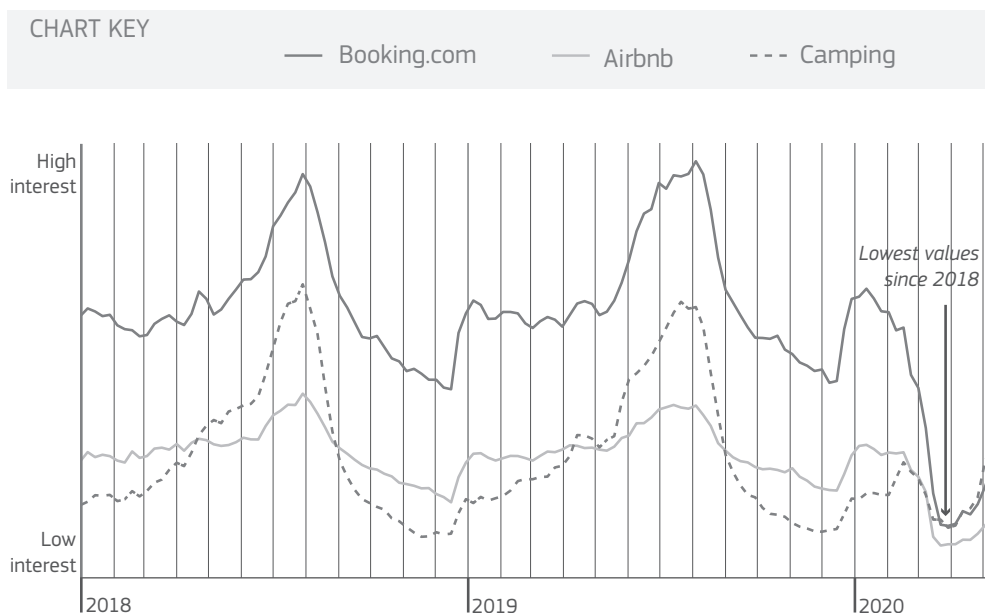
This domain encompasses evolutions in the volume of searches capturing both worries and reactions related to the economy. Among worries, terms related to the economic effects of the lockdown have been included, focusing on the consequences for Governments as well as for Firms and Individuals. Reactions,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



■ Trends of interest in economy-related issues in the 27 EU countries (from 13/03 to 16/05).

Tourism is among the most important economic sectors of the EU as it contributes to about 10% of its GDP. However, tourism is also among the sectors which are expected to pay the highest toll from the covid-19 pandemic. The volume of searches for Booking.com, the most used website in the EU to book accommodation, Airbnb, the queen of the shared economy are at a three-year low.

There are few signs of recovery, albeit its degree varies across the analysed topics. For the first time in five years, the search volume for camping-related queries is higher than those for Booking.com. Further, while camping-related and Booking.com searches have begun a relatively fast recovery, those related to Airbnb are lagging behind. This suggests that the consequences of the pandemic on the tourism sector will not be symmetric, but rather that some areas, such as the rental of holiday accommodation, will suffer more than others.



■ Trends of interest in tourism-related topics in the 27 EU countries (from 01/01/18 to 16/05/20).

## 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 09-16 May 2020.

## WORRIES

Bankruptcy

Dismissal

Unemployment

Layoff

Government debt

## REACTIONS

Loan

Mortgage suspension

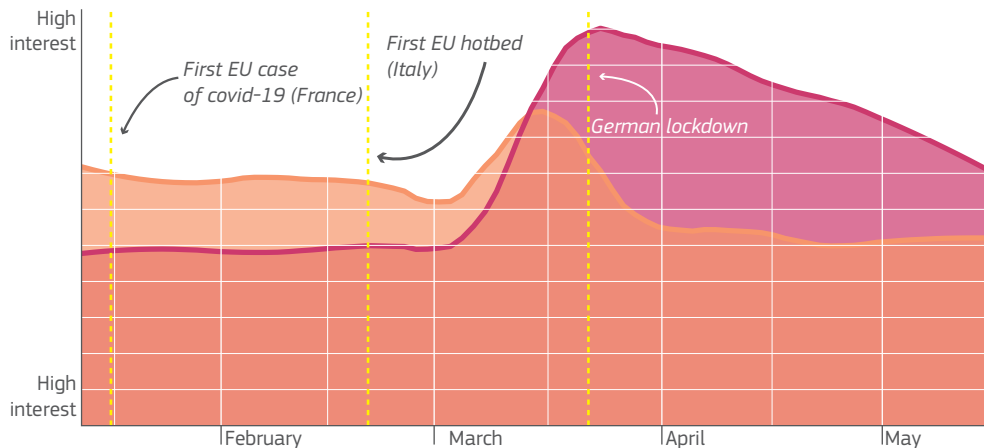
Subsidy

Unemployment benefits

Moratorium

# Social isolation

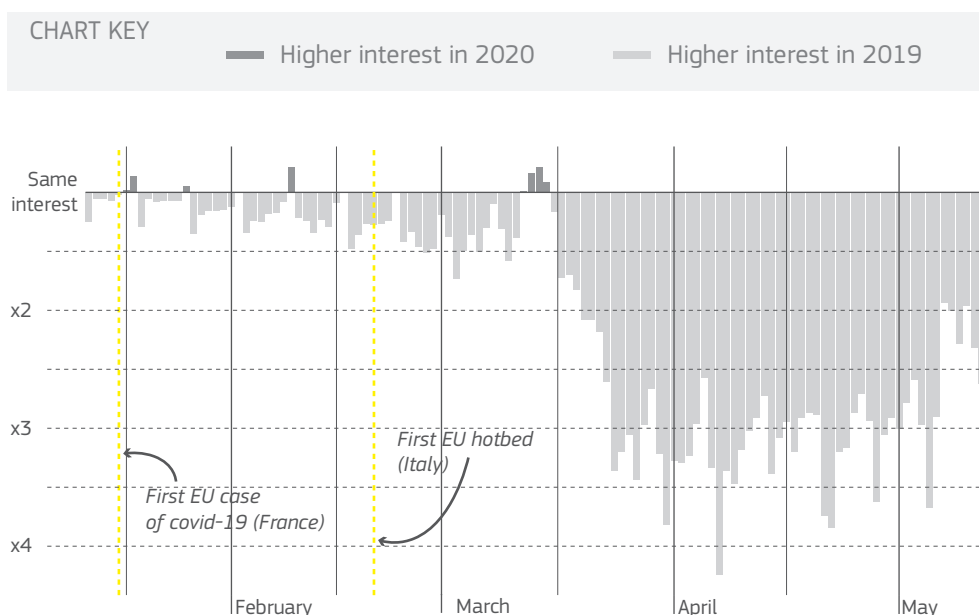
One of the consequences of the restrictive measures adopted in Member States is the social isolation of citizens, who are asked to limit their social interactions. Therefore, this domain encompasses evolutions in the volume of searches capturing both topics related to travel and quarantine expectations (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 16/05).

The graph below shows the difference in the volume of Google searches for flights-related queries in the same period in 2019 and 2020. It shows that, at the beginning of 2020 the search volumes appear already lower than 2019. The difference has then been gradually increasing until April 2020, when the recorded search volume was four times lower than that registered in the same period of 2019.

The exception is represented by the higher volume of searches for flights in mid-March. This might be portraying searches by customers seeking information related to flight cancellations and reimbursements as well as by people seeking means to return home as lockdown measures are increasingly adopted across Europe. Despite the decrease in the gap between 2020 and 2019 during the last week, the search volume for flights still is significantly below the 2019 level for the same period.



■ Difference of interest in flights in the 27 EU countries between 2019 and 2020 (from 13/03 to 16/05).

## 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 09-16 May 2020.

## WORRIES

Bus

Train

Flight

Lockdown

Social distancing

## REACTIONS

Book

Do it yourself

Recipe

Gardening

Streaming media



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