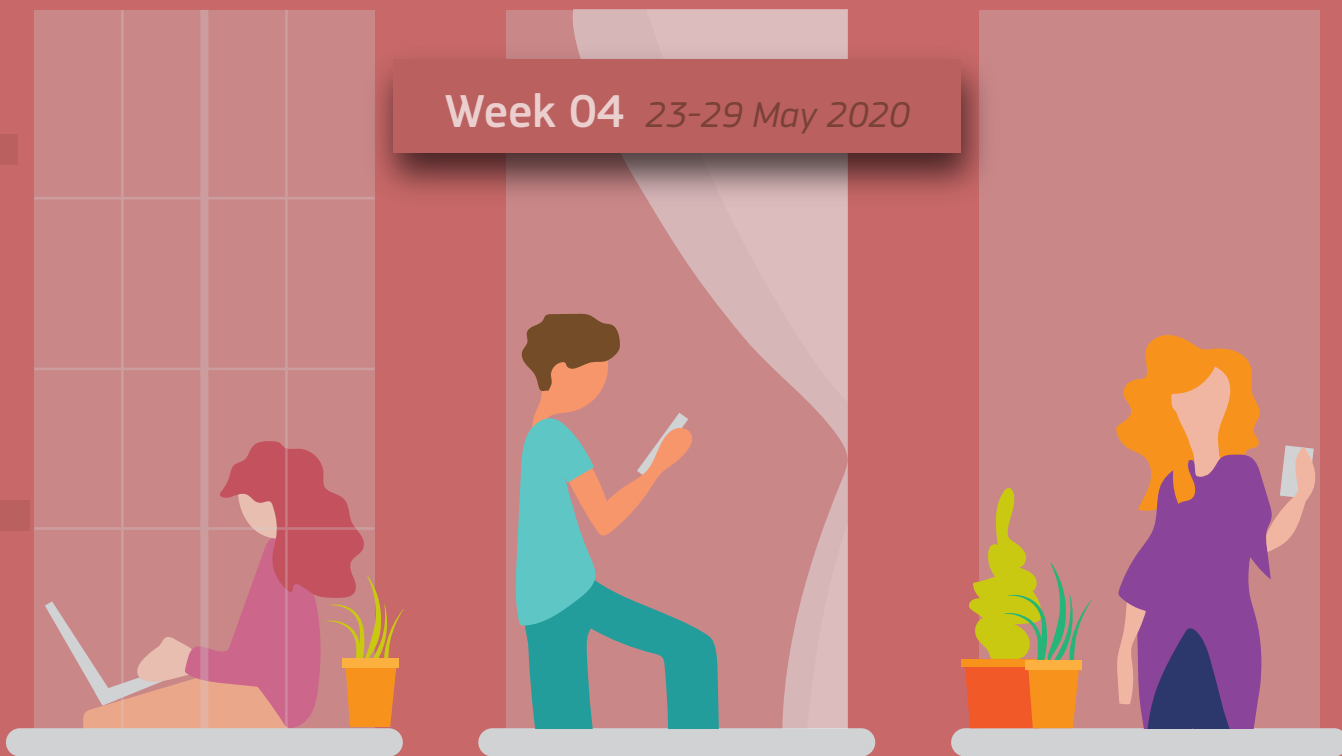




European
Commission

Tracking EU Citizens' Concerns using Google Search Data

Week 04 23-29 May 2020



Search



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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 the report focuses on pandemic-related worries in EU countries.
- ▶ During the last week, the relative search volumes for topics related to both Health worries and reactions have been decreasing. Nonetheless, comparing the same period (9 February-9 May) in 2020 and in 2019, queries related to Symptom show a relevant increase, which is particularly high in those countries where the covid-19 outbreak has been more pronounced.
- ▶ During the last week, also the search volume for queries related to economic worries decreased. At the same time, online retailers might be benefiting from the current situation. As an example, the search volume for Amazon has been generally higher in February-May 2020 than in the same period in 2019, doubling its 2019 value in some countries. Given the far-reaching economic consequences of these changes, it will be important to monitor whether this increase will just be temporary or will persist in the near future.
- ▶ The easing of lockdown measures is identifiable in the increased interest in travel-related topics (Bus, Train and Flight) over the last weeks. At the same time, the lower interest in topics related to work from home (Telecommuting, Video conference and Videotelephony) tell us how people are adapting to the end of lockdown. However, even in the past few weeks, interest for flights remains substantially lower than in the same weeks in 2019.

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 20th, 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, people are slowly going back to some of their routines. Interest in topics related to the infection (Cough, Immunity, Symptom, Shortness of breath), quarantine and work at home (Telecommuting, Video conference, Videotelephony) is decreasing. At the same time, the interest in Travel is growing, even though it is still lower compared to the same period in 2019.

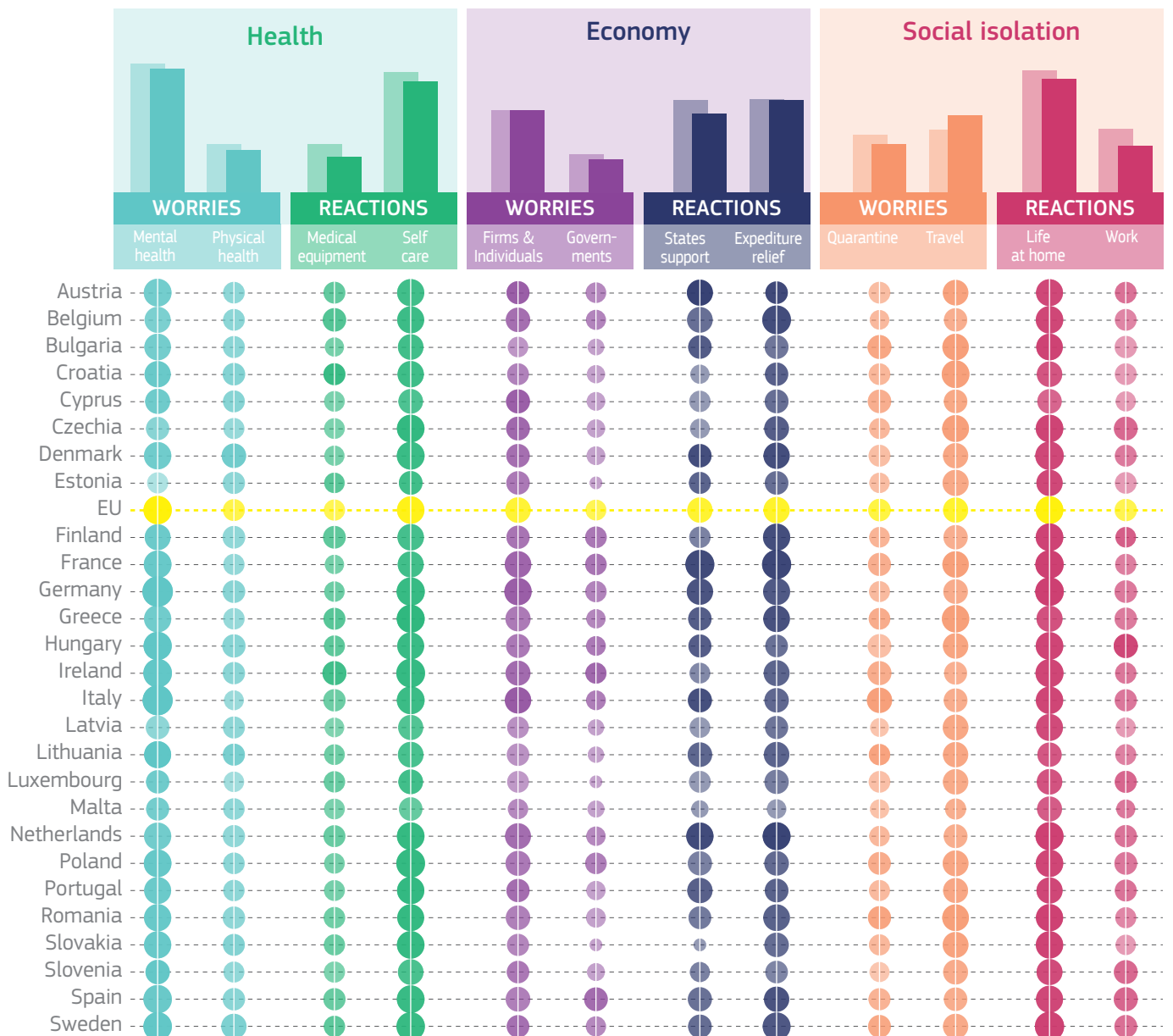
Yet, Interest in economy-related reactions is still high and it is not changed compared with last week. This suggests that, while the most acute phase of the pandemic has now ended, its economic consequences are enduring and show no signs of an immediate improvement; EU citizens still actively search for ways to cope with income losses and/or reduce their expenditures.

CHART KEY

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

25/04/2020 - 16/05/2020
17-23/05/2020

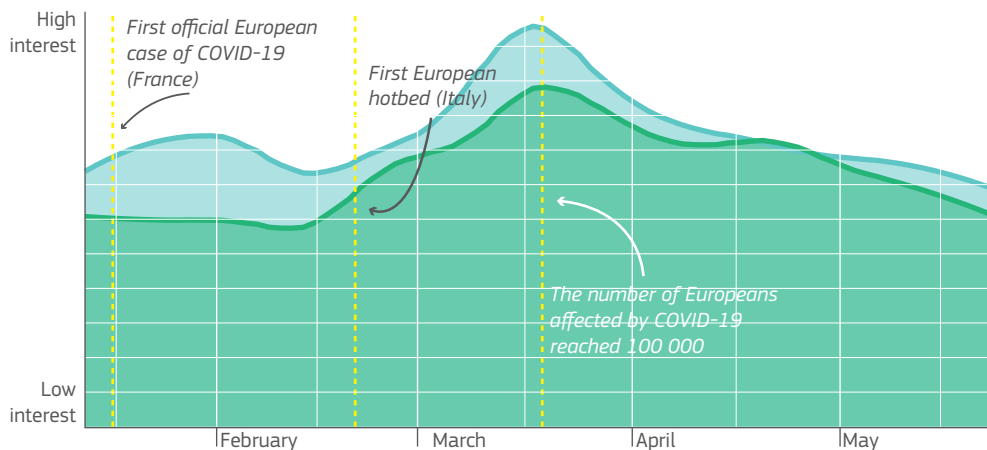
The **Bubbles** size shows the amount of Google searches for each topic in each country



■ Overview of the amount of Google searches in the 27 EU countries (reference period 17-23/05/2020).

Health

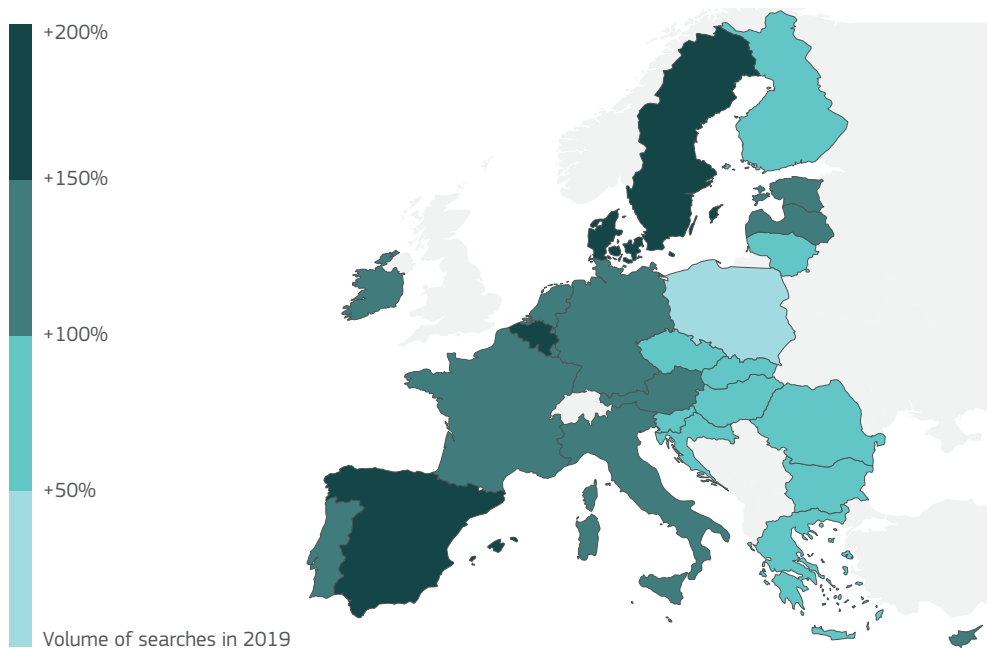
Following the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, Europeans' interest in health-related topics became particularly intense. This domain encompasses worries for physical and mental health, and it captures as reactions changes in lifestyle and habits, such as medical equipment (e.g., searches for dust masks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



■ Trends of interest in health-related issues in the 27 EU countries (from 13/01 to 23/05).

The map below shows the difference between search volume for queries related to Symptom in the same period in 2019 and 2020. The difference in interest is particularly high in Belgium, Spain and Sweden, where an increase of more than 150% compared to the previous year has been registered. In Eastern-European countries, the search volume is indeed higher than in the same period last year, but the increase is less pronounced than that of other European macro-regions.

With a few exceptions (Denmark), there seems to have been a higher increase in countries in which the covid-19 outbreak has been more pronounced. Importantly, Sweden, which adopted a less-stringent containment strategy than many other countries, shows one of the highest values recorded in the whole EU for worries related to the symptoms of the virus.



■ Interest difference in 'Symptom' between 2019 and 2020 (from 09 February to 09 May).

WORRIES

Physical health
Cough, Immunity, Symptom, Shortness of breath

Mental health
Anxiety, Panic attack

REACTIONS

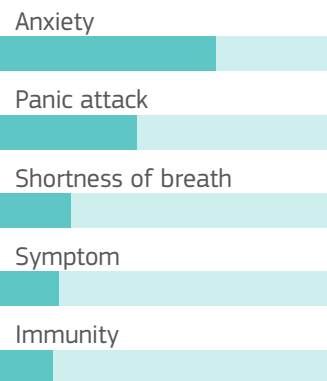
Medical equipment
Antiviral drug, Dust mask, Hand sanitizer, Vaccine

Self care
Exercise, Nutrition, Psychotherapy, Yoga

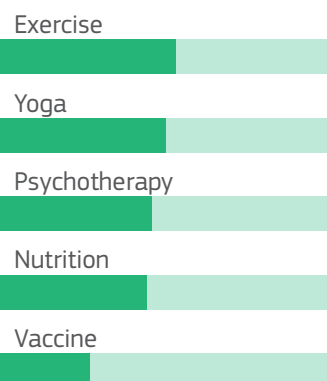
MOST SEARCHED TOPICS

Here listed the most searched topics composing the health related indicators in the week 17-23 May 2020.

WORRIES

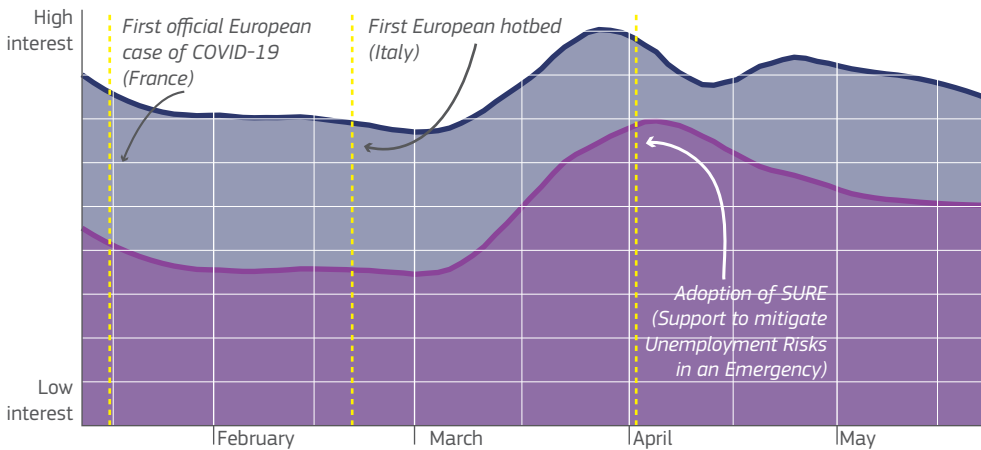


REACTIONS



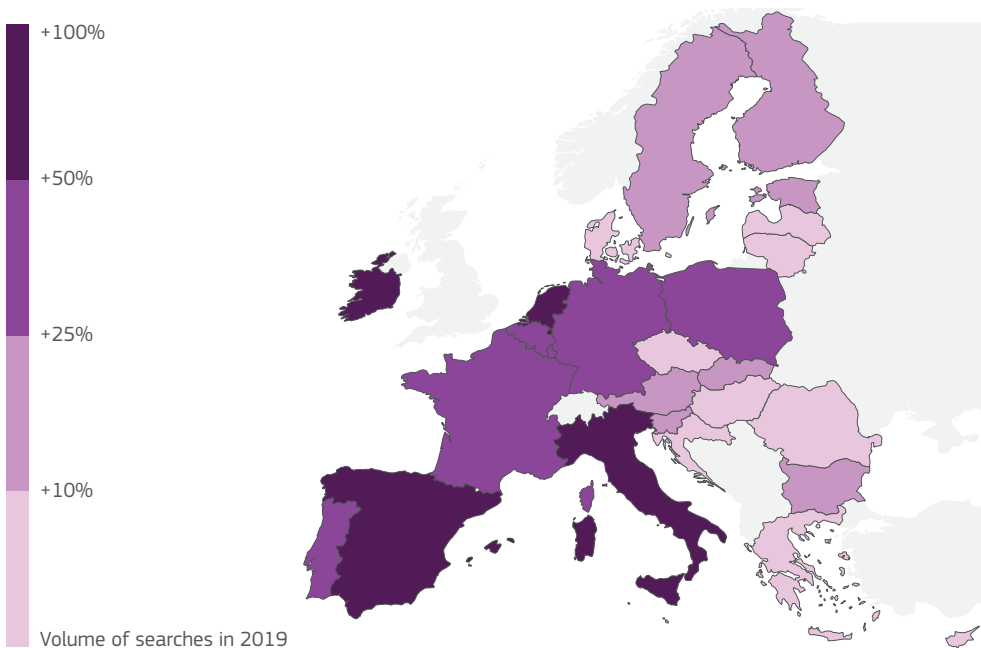
Economy

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 13/01 to 23/05).

At the same time, online retailers might be benefiting from the current situation. For example, it is possible to notice that the search volume for Amazon has been higher during 2020, as compared to the same period in 2019. The increase is particularly pronounced in Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain, with a search volume 50 to 100% higher than that of last year. Countries in Central Europe registered a significantly higher volume (25-50%), while countries in Northern and Eastern Europe show a more moderate increase (between 10 and 25%). Given the far-reaching economic consequences (in particular for small and local retailers), it will be important to monitor whether this increase will be just temporary or will persist in the near future.



■ Interest difference in 'Amazon' between 2019 and 2020 (from 09 February to 09 May).

WORRIES

Firms & individuals
Bankruptcy, Dismissal, Layoff, Unemployment

Governments
Eurobond, European Stability Mechanism, Government Debt

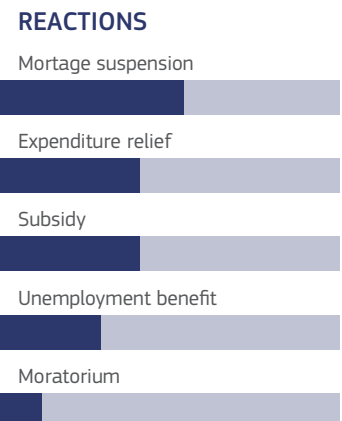
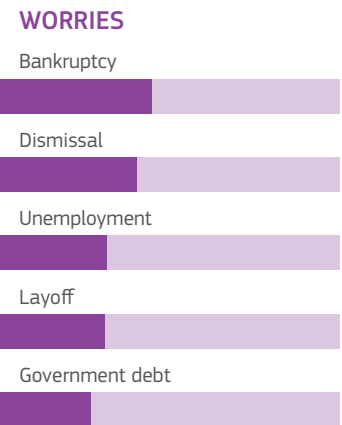
REACTIONS

Expenditure relief
Loan, Moratorium, Mortgage suspension

States support
Subsidy, Unemployment benefits

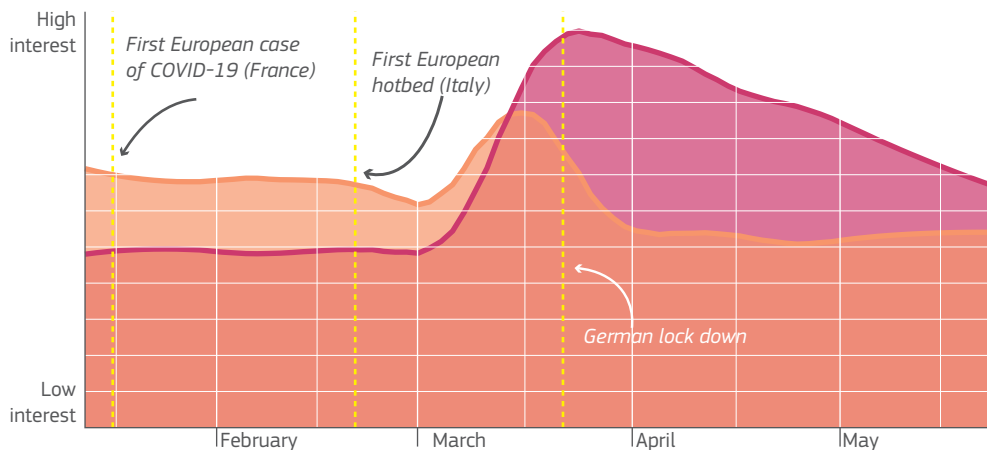
MOST SEARCHED TOPICS

Here listed the most searched topics composing the economy related indicators in the week 17-23 May 2020.



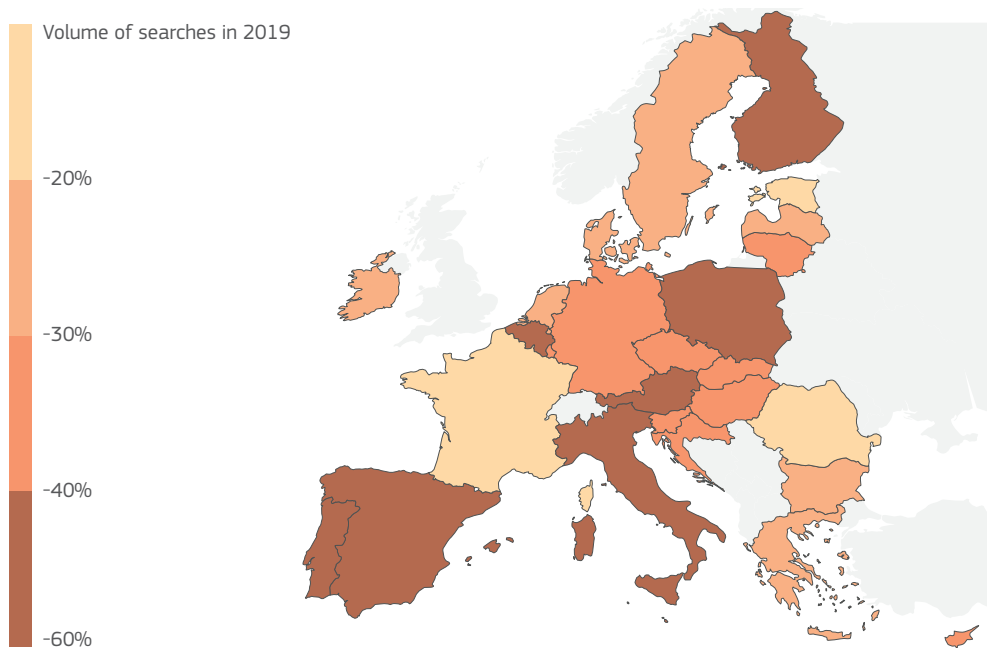
Social isolation

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 13/01 to 23/05).

The map below shows the lower interest in Flight over the last month of 2020 (May) if compared with the same month in 2019. The lower volume of searches in this topic is highly influenced by the travel restrictions in EU countries. The difference in interest is not homogeneous among EU countries and this might be partly due to differences in international and domestic travel restrictions. Nonetheless, the contract remains noticeable in all countries even now that lockdown measures are being lifted. However, once compared with the peak of the pandemic, the easing of lockdown measures is identifiable in the EU citizens' increased interest in travel-related topics over the last weeks. At the same time, another element that shows how people are slowly going back to some of their routines, is the lower interest in topics related to work from home (Telecommuting, Video conference and Videotelephony).



■ Interest difference in 'Flights' between 2019 and 2020 (from 23 April to 23 May).

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

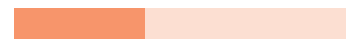
Telecommuting, Video conference, Videotelephony

MOST SEARCHED TOPICS

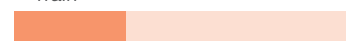
Here listed the most searched topics composing the social isolation related indicators in the week 17-23 May 2020.

WORRIES

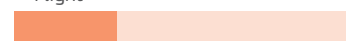
Bus



Train



Flight



Social distancing



Lockdown



REACTIONS

Book



Do it yourself



Gardening



Recipe



Streaming media





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