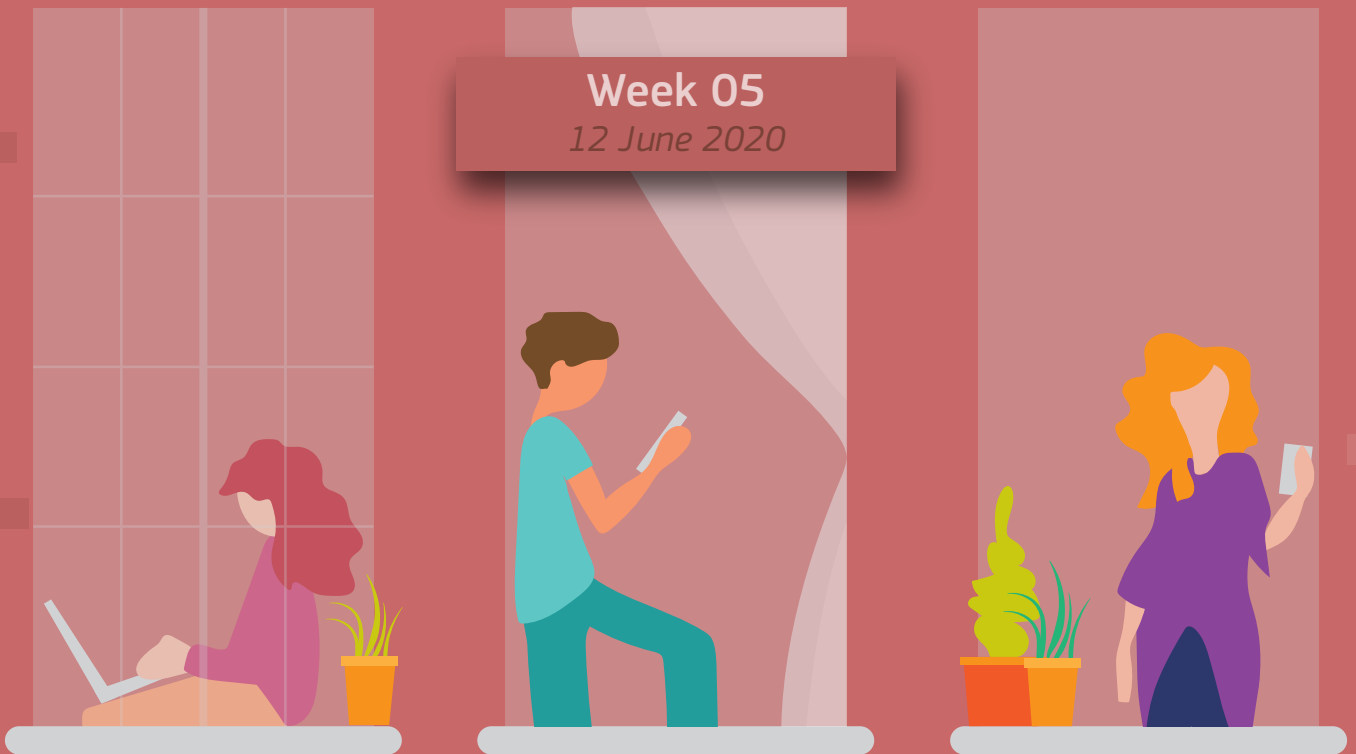


Tracking EU Citizens' Concerns using Google Search Data

Week 05
12 June 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 explores how topics related to the Green Deal (such as pollution, electric cars and transport) interact with the pandemic.
- ▶ A peak of searches on pollution-related topics was recorded in late March when several articles showed effects of lockdown on air pollution. The most common queries associated with pollution in each country confirm the interest in the beneficial effect of lockdowns for the environment. Yet, they also highlight concerns about possible interactions between particulate and the infection.
- ▶ In the wake of the pandemic, interest towards electric cars dropped to its 2016 levels. Yet, when lockdowns were being lifted, the relative volume of searches for queries related to electric cars surged, quickly returning to the pre-pandemic peak. The pandemic has only paused EU citizens' interest towards more environmental-friendly cars.
- ▶ Interest in bicycle-related searches reached its peak in early June. Citizens are looking for local transport modes that they perceive as safe. If this trend will be sustained, it will have important consequences for urban areas and have a positive impact on the level of pollution.

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, the interest in Travel (Bus, Flight and Train) has been increasing, suggesting that people are gradually starting to explore ways of moving while lockdown measures are being lifted. At the same time, worries related to physical health kept decreasing: there is a reduction in fears of contagion and its consequences.

Yet, the effects of the pandemic persist in the economy. The relative interest for Unemployment benefits and state benefits remains high, suggesting that the pandemic is leaving a scar on households' finances.

CHART KEY

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

10-31/05/2020
31/05/2020-06/06/2020

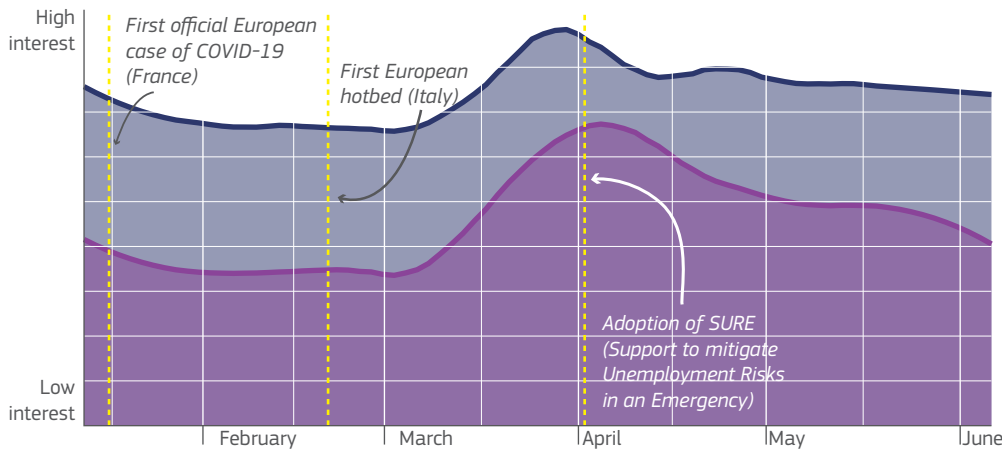
The **Bubbles** size shows the amount of Google searches for each topic in each country



■ Overview of the amount of Google searches in the 27 EU countries (reference period 31/05/2020 - 06/06/2020).

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 06/06).

In the wake of the pandemic, interest towards electric cars dropped to its 2016 levels. Yet, when lockdowns were being lifted, the relative volume of searches for queries related to electric cars surged, quickly returning to the pre-pandemic peak. The pandemic has only paused EU citizens' interest towards more environmental-friendly cars.

A large contribution to this trend can be linked with incentives and subsidies for the purchase of electric cars announced as part of fiscal stimuli by few Governments. Buyers in Germany can expect a subsidy of about 9 000 euros. In France, buyers could be eligible to receive up to 12 000 euros. Other countries will likely follow, suggesting that the trends of interest towards climate- and environmentally-friendly vehicles will continue throughout the year.



■ Trends of interest in electric cars in the 27 EU countries over the last 5 years.

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 31 May - 06 June 2020.

WORRIES

Dismissal

Unemployment

Bankruptcy

Government debt

Layoff

REACTIONS

Loan

Mortgage suspension

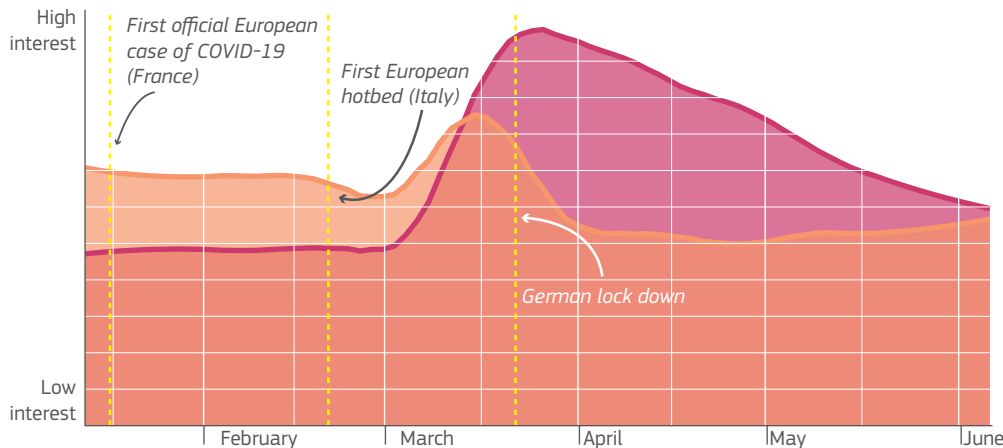
Subsidy

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.

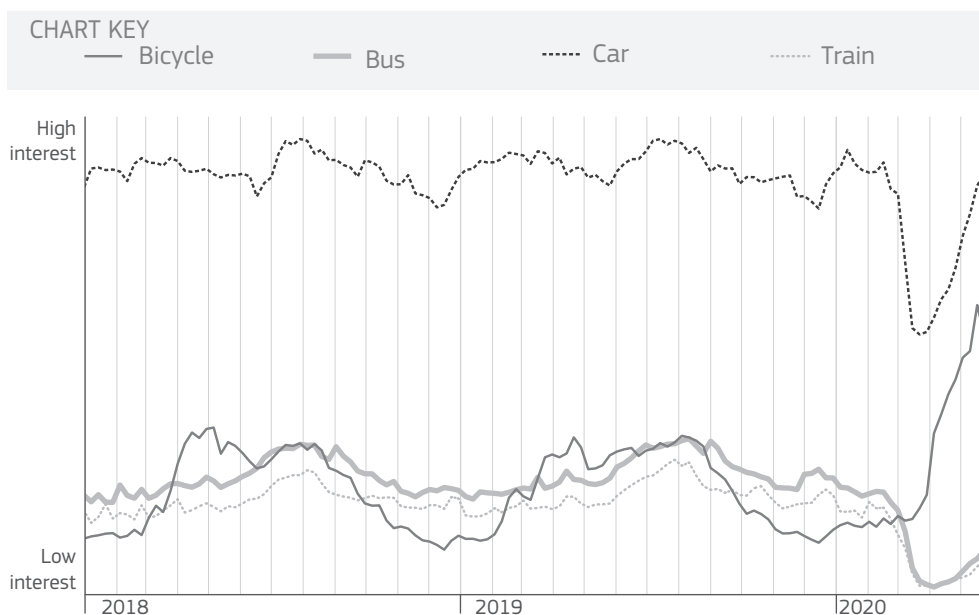


■ Trends of interest in social isolation-related issues in the 27 EU countries (from 13/01 to 06/06).

The graph below shows the trends for queries related to different means of transport: Car, Train, Bus and Bicycle. The volume of searches for Bus, Car and Train show a relevant drop during the peak of the pandemic due to the containment measures adopted in several EU countries.

As lockdown measures are lifted, the search volume for Car returns close to its pre-pandemic levels. Searches for public transport, such as Bus and Train, are still lagging behind, possibly due to concerns related to travelling in close contact with other people.

Importantly, the trend in the search volume for Bicycle sticks out, showing the highest value over the last years, suggesting that citizens might be looking for local transport modes that they perceive as safe. If this trend will be sustained, it will have important consequences for urban areas and have a positive impact on the level of pollution.



■ Trends of interest in mobility-related topics in the 27 EU countries (from 01/2018 to 06/2020).

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 31 May - 06 June 2020.

WORRIES

Bus

Train

Flight

Social distancing

Lockdown

REACTIONS

Book

Do-it-yourself

Gardening

Recipe

Streaming media



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