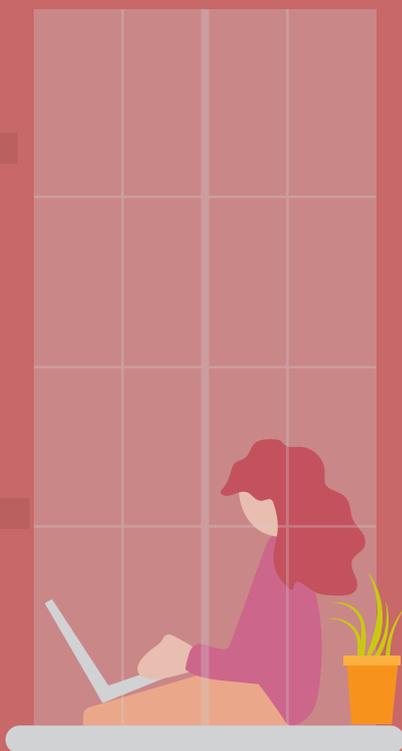


Tracking EU Citizens' Concerns using Google Search Data

Week 10
30 September 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 September 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>

An online version of this publication is available at:

https://ec.europa.eu/knowledge4policy/publication/tracking-eu-citizens-concerns-using-google-search-data-week-10_en



© 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 10 | 30 September 2020*, European Commission, Ispra, 2020

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 school and education.
- ▶ School-related searches appear uneven across EU Countries. In Italy and Germany people often search for school and coronavirus together while in Belgium, Portugal and France searches for virtual school suggest a high interest in IT equipment for education.
- ▶ Countries where interest in E-Learning increased the most in 2020 compared to 2019 are also the countries where people have lower digital literacy according to the DESI Index. This suggests that in some countries, a steeper effort was needed to adapt to digital education than in others.
- ▶ In most EU countries, laptop-related searches have been higher than in the holiday season, suggesting that the pandemic forced households to buy (or upgrade) their laptops. This signals how the impact of the pandemic has been asymmetric across income-groups, as unexpected expenses for IT equipment might have been more difficult to meet for lower-income households.
- ▶ The covid-19 pandemic, which forced near-EU wide school closures and travel restrictions, has limited Erasmus uptakes. Erasmus-related searches dropped dramatically in the wake of the covid-19 pandemic, being now more than four times lower than their 2019 value.

Overview

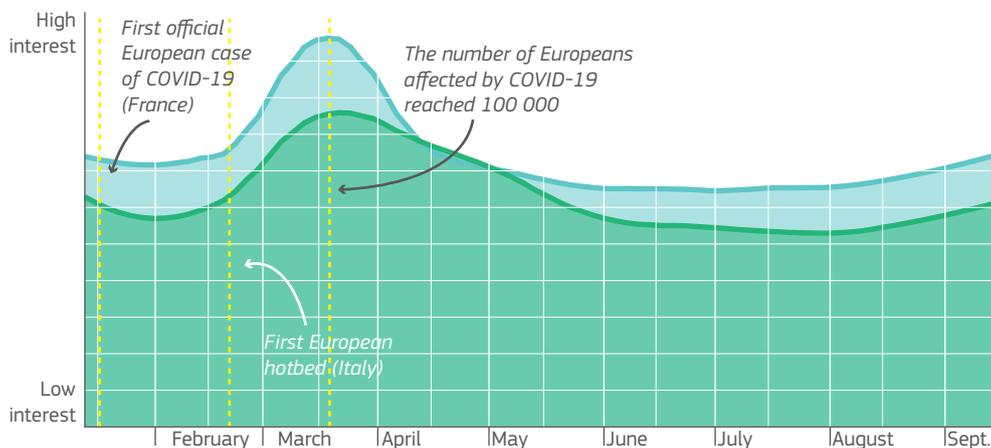
The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic abruptly changed the life of European citizens. Starting from the first recorded EU hotbed in Northern Italy on February 20th, the virus rapidly spread across several EU countries. In this context, Google searches by EU citizens provide timely insights about Europeans' concerns. 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.

Trends

After peaking in late March and April, trends of interest in topics related to Health, Economy and Social Isolation remained quite stable during the summer, recording values in line with their pre-pandemic levels, albeit searches related to health worries are now showing a slight increase. A similar upward trend can also be seen among economic reactions driven by an increase in searches for Loans and Mortgage suspensions.

While the effects of the covid-19 pandemic are still visible on volume and type of searches, recent trends confirm that Europeans moved towards a new normal, as, for example, searches for video conferencing tools are decreasing due to the easing of movement restrictions and acquired digital knowledge.



■ Trends of interest in health-related issues in the 27 EU countries (reference period: 13/01-15/09).

WORRIES

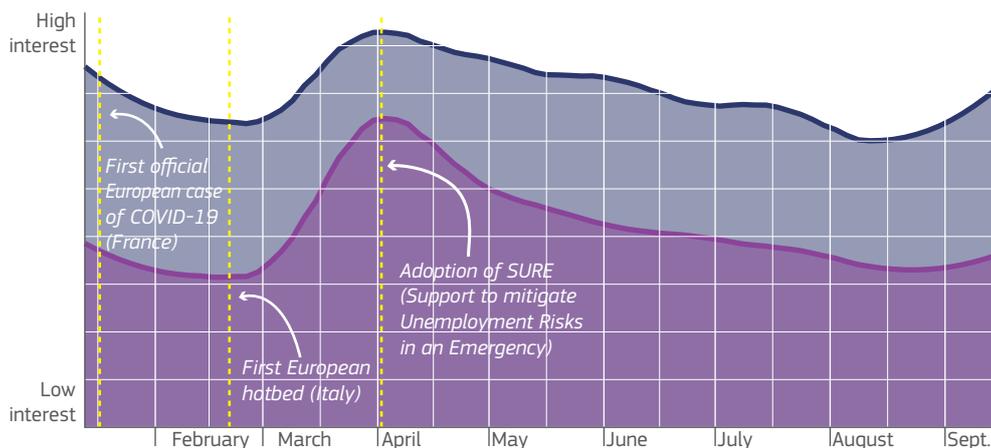
Physical health
Cough, Immunity, Symptom, Shortness of breath

Mental health
Anxiety, Panic attack

REACTIONS

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

Self care
Exercise, Nutrition, Psychotherapy, Yoga



■ Trends of interest in economy-related issues in the 27 EU countries (reference period: 13/01-15/09).

WORRIES

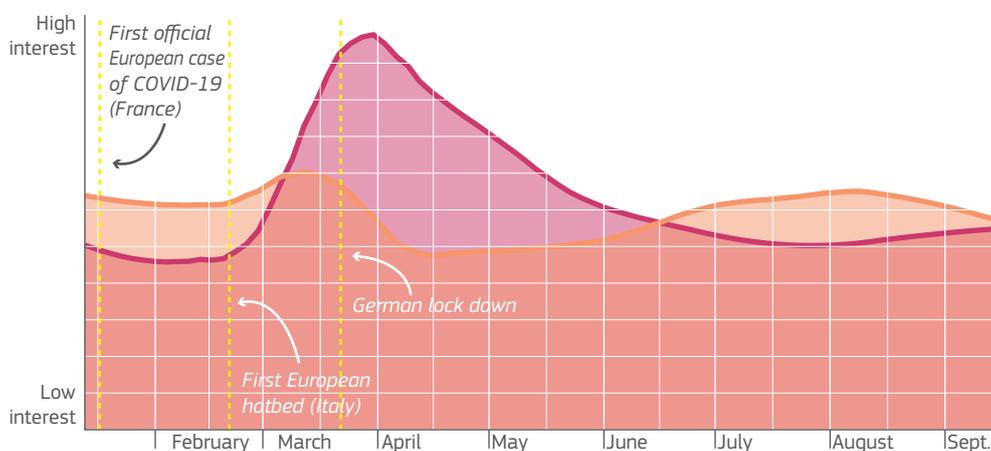
Firms & individuals
Bankruptcy, Dismissal, Layoff, Unemployment

Governments
Eurobond, European Stability Mechanism, Government Debt

REACTIONS

Expenditure relief
Loan, Moratorium, Mortgage suspension

States support
Subsidy, Unemployment benefits



■ Trends of interest in social isolation-related issues in the 27 EU countries (reference period: 13/01-15/09).

WORRIES

Quarantine expectation
Lockdown, Quarantine, Social distancing

Travel
Bus, Flight, Train

REACTIONS

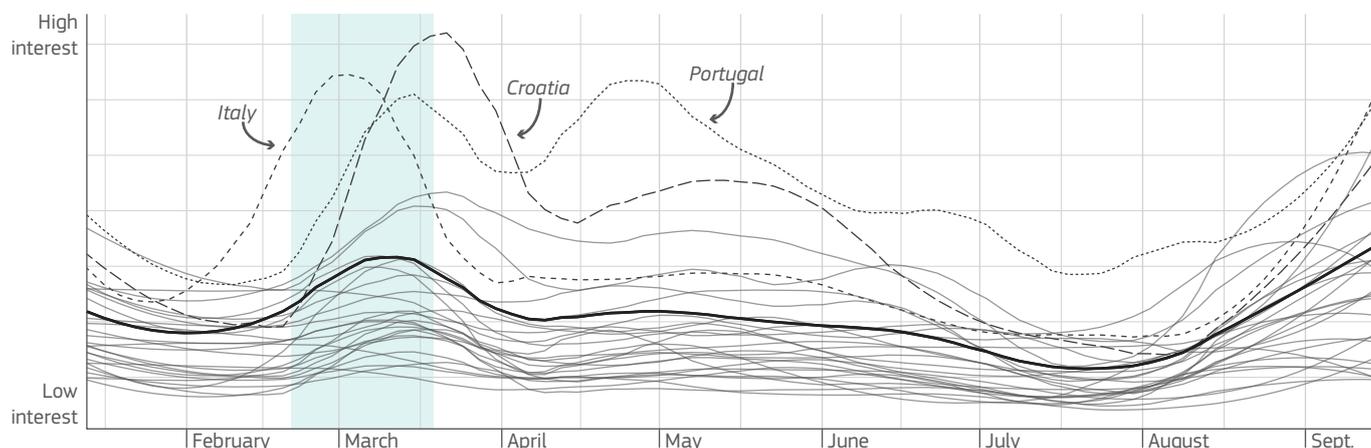
Life at home
Book, Do it yourself, Gardening, Online game, Recipe, Streaming media

Work
Telecommuting, Video conference, Videotelephony

Europe goes back to school

The covid-19 pandemic has been causing disruption in educational systems worldwide, resulting in the near-total closures of schools regardless of their level. This posed a number of unprecedented challenges, ranging from the urge to quickly adapt entire educational systems to online learning practices to the individual parents' needs to rearrange the way they work and share living spaces with their children.

Moving entire classrooms online has brought out some new necessities, and exacerbated some pre-existing ones: adequate IT equipment, home-study spaces and fast and reliable internet access are but a few of these aspects. This issue of the Weekly Update attempts to shed light on some of these new challenges.



■ Trends of interest in 'School' and 'Coronavirus' in the 27 EU countries (reference period: 13 January 2020 - 15 September 2020).

Member States adopted different strategies to guarantee education during the covid-19 crisis, and this brought to different levels of attention and interest among the population. Interest in school increased in most European countries after the first outbreak in late February, with particularly steep increases in Italy, Croatia and Portugal. The timing of the first peaks suggests a relation with the school closures in the three countries. Italy enforced closures in the regions with the higher circulation of SARS-CoV-2 in the second half of February, to reach full school closure on March 5th, followed by Portugal (March 15th) and Croatia (March 20th). In Portugal though, the interest for School peaked in the second half of April. In Latvia, Lithuania and Luxembourg, the sanitary crisis doesn't seem to influence interest in this topic.



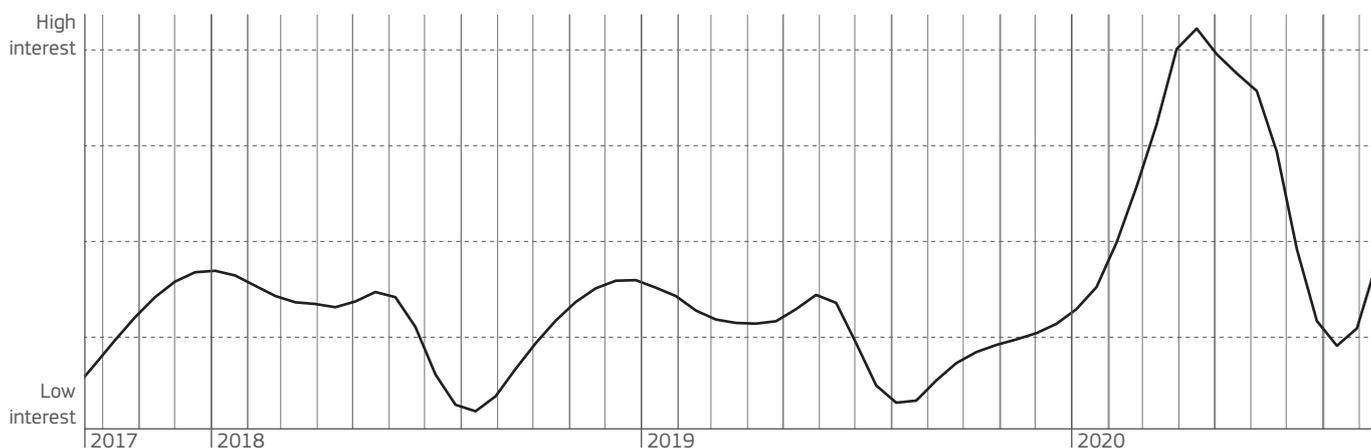
■ Word cloud of most related queries to the topic 'School' in Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain (reference period: January - September 2020).

Overall, school-related searches appear uneven across EU Countries. However, looking at the top queries related to the topic some patterns can be identified.

In Italy and Germany, for example, people often search for school and coronavirus together to get information about changes due to the pandemic. Conversely, this relation is not visible in Hungary and Poland as these two countries are having a peak of infections only in these days. Finally, in Belgium, Portugal and France, searches for virtual school suggest a high interest in IT equipment for education.

Lockdowns and social distancing measures heavily affected learning processes. Compulsory education, training and other learning activities largely moved online, with virtual classes being the new teaching standard. The volume of Google searches for E-Learning confirms this trend.

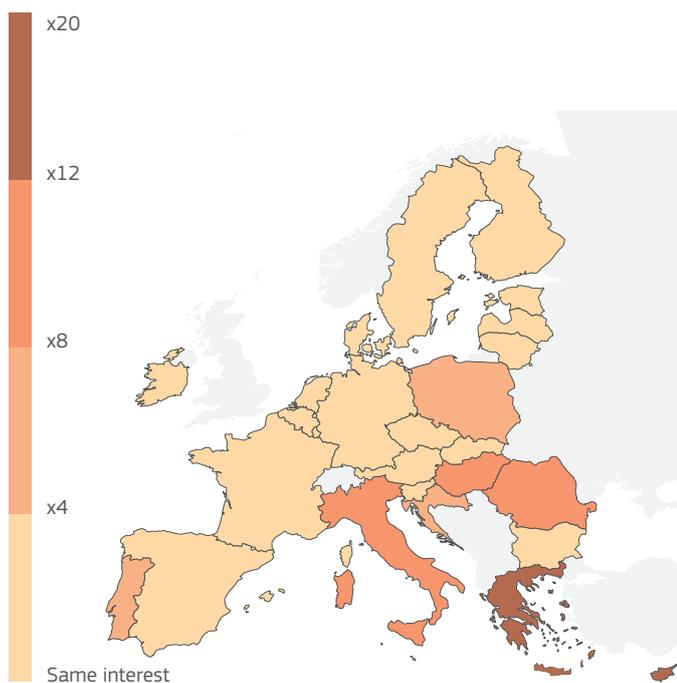
In February 2020 the interest for E-Learning rises above the level of the same period in the previous years. The volume of searches in EU countries then peaks in April, to then decrease until August. This trend shows an increased interest in the topic also during the summer break as training and other learning activities continued to be held virtually.



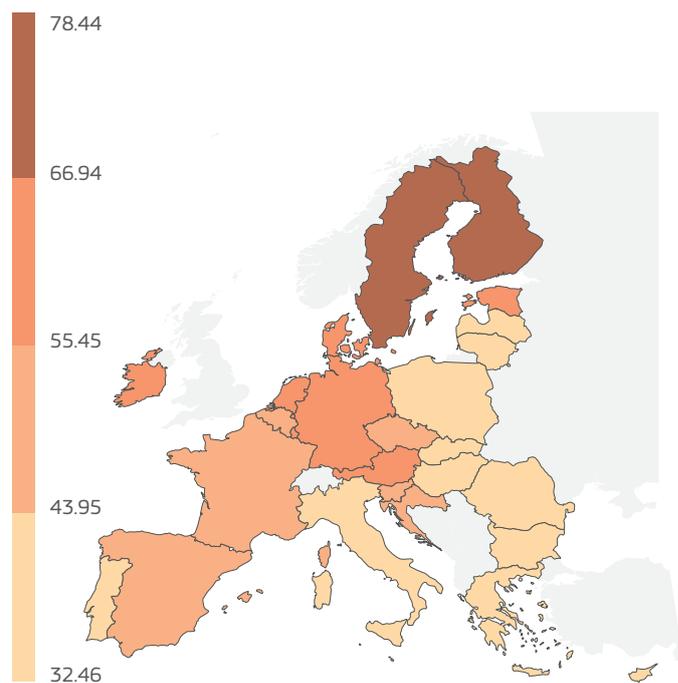
■ Trend of interest in 'E-Learning' in the 27 EU countries over last three years (reference period: 13 January 2017 - 15 September 2020).

The maps show, on the one hand, how the interest for E-Learning changed over the last year, and the level of people's digital skills in European countries on the other. The latter is measured by the Human Capital dimension of the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI).

Countries where interest in E-Learning increased the most in 2020 compared to 2019 are also the countries where people have lower digital literacy according to the DESI Index. This suggests that in some countries, a steeper effort was needed to adapt to digital education than in other, more digitally savvy, countries.

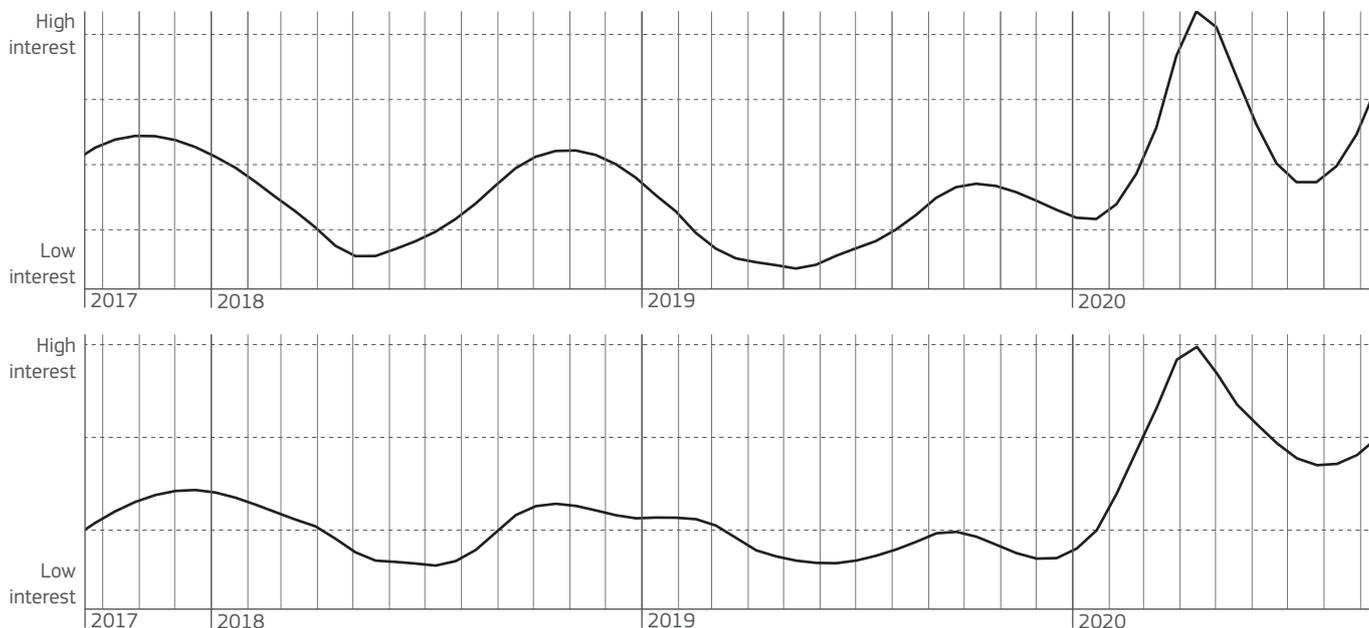


■ Difference of interest in 'E-Learning' between 2019 and 2020



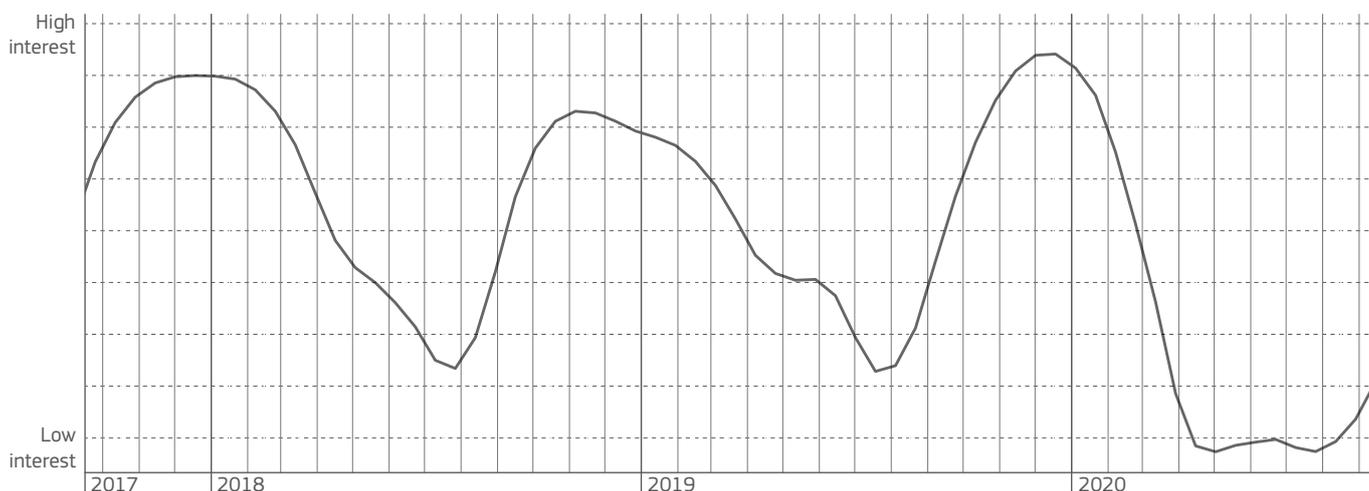
■ Country performance for Human Capital according to DESI Index.

E-learning requires suitable IT equipment and a fast and reliable internet connection. The graphs below show the interest in Laptop and Speedtest.net (a web platform allowing users to test their connection quality), over three years. It is possible to notice that, since the beginning of 2020, the interest for both Laptop and Speedtest.net rapidly increased, to reach a peak in April 2020.



■ Trend of interest over last three years in 'Laptop' (above) and 'Speedtest.net' (below) in the 27 EU countries.

In most EU countries, the interest for laptop-related searches has been higher than in the holiday season, suggesting that the pandemic forced households to buy (or upgrade) their laptops. This, however, also signals how the impact of the pandemic has been asymmetric across income-groups, as unexpected expenses for IT equipment might have been more difficult to cover for lower-income households. Further, a regional divide might have been exacerbated: increased searches for Speedtest.net suggest the need for stable, high-speed connections, which are not homogeneously available across Europe.



■ Trend of interest over last three years in 'Erasmus' in the 27 EU countries.

The Erasmus programme is one of the most successful programmes of the European Union, funding up to 2 million young Europeans to study and train abroad. The covid-19 pandemic, which forced near-EU wide school closures and travel restrictions, has limited Erasmus uptakes, forcing many students to lose their opportunity to study and train abroad.

As the graph shows, the interest for Erasmus dropped dramatically in the wake of the covid-19 pandemic, being now more than four times lower than its 2019 value. The drop has been particularly accentuated in Poland, Netherlands, Germany and Italy, where Erasmus-related searches have been more than six times lower than in 2019.



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



@EU_ScienceHub



EU Science Hub - Joint Research Centre



EU Science, Research and Innovation



EU Science Hub