FACTSHEET

Fifth round of the Living, working and COVID-19 *e-survey*: *Living in a new era of uncertainty*

Introduction

The *Living, working and COVID-19* e-survey highlights the **heavy toll of the pandemic**, and sheds light on a **new uncertain reality** caused by the war in Ukraine, record high inflation and sharp rises in the cost of living. The latest results, from spring 2022, provide the following insights:

- overall, mental well-being has not recovered to the level that might have been expected, despite the lifting of most COVID-19 restrictions
- the effects of restrictions on mental well-being were strongest among younger people, for whom mental well-being has improved
- unmet healthcare needs continue to affect around one in five respondents, with unmet mental healthcare needs most common among young people, despite an improvement since spring 2021, and a rise in such needs among women
- due to rising energy prices, respondents are now under greater financial pressure than at any time during the pandemic, and at greater risk of energy poverty
- trust in institutions has fallen, both among respondents who are struggling to make ends meet and, for the first time, also among people in financially more secure positions
- there is a notable amount of political engagement among unvaccinated compared to vaccinated respondents
- respondents who chose social media as their preferred news source have lower trust in established institutions than respondents who use traditional media, with the biggest difference found for trust in government and trust in news media
- the pandemic seems not to have triggered the expected and desired work-from-home revolution, at least not among the e-survey respondents, many of whom are working exclusively at their workplace again

Background

In April 2020, Eurofound launched its *Living, working and COVID-19* e-survey across the European Union, not knowing how long the newly reported coronavirus disease (COVID-19) would be around, whether a vaccination would be developed and what would be the overall impact of the pandemic. To date, five rounds of the e-survey have been fielded, resulting in the collection of responses from over 200,000 people. Thanks to this large-scale, pan-European participation, Eurofound has been able to investigate the impact of the pandemic on the well-being, health and safety, work and telework, work–life balance and financial situation of Europeans. The first round was fielded when a large part of European society was in lockdown following the onset of the crisis, and the aim of the e-survey was to gauge the immediate social and economic effects. A second round took place three months later, in July 2020, when society across Europe began to reopen again following the first, intense lockdown; this was followed by a third round in February/March 2021 during a resurgence of COVID-19 cases, leading to further or extended lockdowns in many Member States. The *Living, working and COVID-19* e-survey includes a panel component that tracks the developments of respondents. In autumn 2021, these respondents were invited to complete a further questionnaire (round four).[1] The latest round of the COVID-19 e-survey was fielded in spring 2022, when society was in the process of gradually re-opening. This positive development, normally a cause for celebration after two long years of closures and restrictions, has been overshadowed by the start of the war in Ukraine on 24 February 2022.

This factsheet presents a selection of main findings from the spring 2020, spring 2021 and spring 2022 rounds of the e-survey and provides a picture of how the social and economic situation of Europeans has evolved during the pandemic.

1 For information on the e-survey methodology, see https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/topic/covid-19

The *Living, working and COVID-19* e-survey is open to anyone aged 18 and over with access to the internet. Acknowledging that the sampling methodology is non-probabilistic, the data are weighted to reflect the demographic profile of the sample in terms of age, gender, region and education of each Member State and for the European Union as a whole. As such, the e-survey provides useful insights into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people's lives, allowing for comparisons between different groups of respondents and, importantly, between different rounds.[2]

Measuring the cost of two years of COVID-19

Job loss rate has fallen across the EU

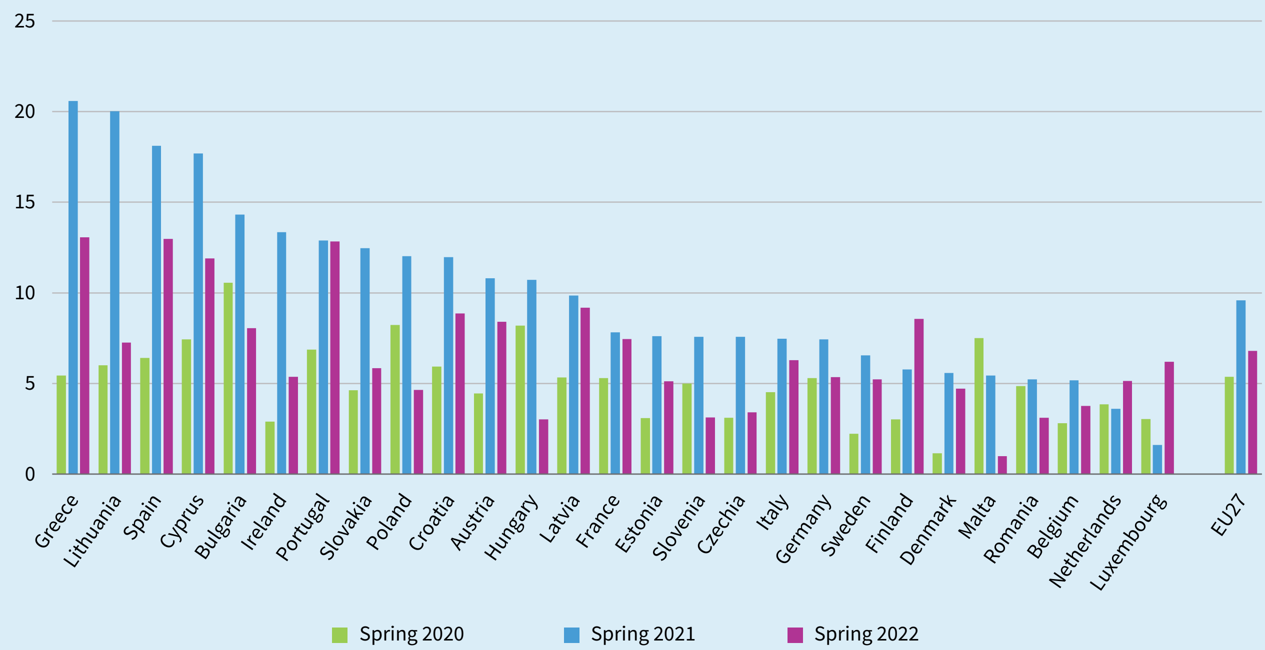
With the ending of the restrictions on economic activity in nearly all Member States by spring 2022, unemployment decreased across the EU, from a pandemic height of 7.8% in late 2020 to 6.2% in spring 2022 – lower than the unemployment rate at the start of the pandemic (6.5%).[3] Consequently, the average rate of job loss in the EU, measured in the e-survey as the proportion of respondents who are unemployed now after being employed pre-pandemic, has decreased from 9.6% in spring 2021 to 6.8% in spring 2022, although it has not yet reverted to the job loss rate measured in the early months of the pandemic in spring 2020 (5.4%). This decrease was observed among respondents in nearly all countries, except for Portugal, where the job loss rate stayed the same, as well as Finland, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, where the job loss rate had been low compared with other countries (Figure 1).

Job loss during the pandemic has affected young people disproportionately compared with older age groups: in spring 2021, 17% of people aged 18 to 29 reported losing their job.[4] A year later in 2022, according to the e-survey, only 9% say they lost their job during the pandemic and are still unemployed. While still above the unemployment rate for the other age groups, this decrease in job loss among young people reflects the recovery of jobs following the reopening of sectors where youth are traditionally overrepresented, such as hospitality and retail.

Teleworking declined, with two out of three respondents now working exclusively from the office

The pandemic introduced working from home into nearly all sectors and occupations, with workers in many countries continuing to go to their workplace every day only if it was deemed essential for the functioning of the economy and society. This situation resulted in an increase in the proportion of people usually working from home: from 5% in 2019 to 12% in 2020.[5] It was widely asserted that teleworking represented a new mode of working,[6] and

Figure 1: Proportion of people who became unemployed during the pandemic by country, EU27 (%)



Source: *Living, working and COVID-19* e-survey series

2 For the purposes of this factsheet, the sample consists of 153,436 cleaned EU27 responses: 67,685 from round 1, 46,800 from round 3 and 38,951 from round 5.

3 Eurostat, *Unemployment by sex and age* [une_rt_m]

4 Eurofound (2021), Impact of COVID-19 on young people in the EU

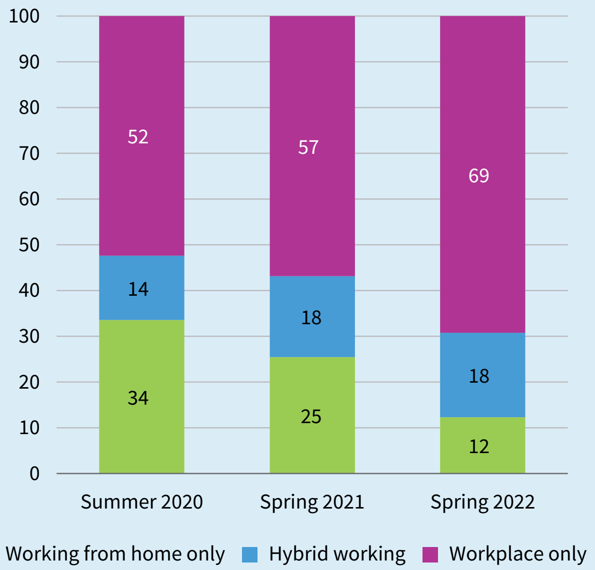
5 Eurostat, *Employed persons working from home as a percentage of the total employment* [lfsa_ehomp]

6 European Commission, *Horizon Magazine*, 1 September 2020, Teleworking is here to stay – here's what it means for the future of work

that the pandemic launched a work-from-home revolution that would change the future of work permanently.[7] The fifth round of the *Living, working and COVID-19* e-survey aims to chart the evolution of teleworking over the course of a two-year time span.[8]

In the summer of 2020, just over 33% of EU workers surveyed worked exclusively from home, which decreased to 25% by 2021. The return to the workplace seems to have continued as restrictions were lifted: by spring 2022, only 12% are working exclusively from home. Hybrid work (working partly from home, partly from the workplace) gained ground in 2021, and has stayed at the same level in 2022 (Figure 2). It is likely that some of the people who worked exclusively from home now work in a hybrid way, with some returning to the office full time.

Figure 2: Location of work across three e-survey rounds (%)



Hybrid work is most common in the financial services sector (36%) and in public administration (32%). Financial service workers are also the most likely to work completely from home (23%). Due to fewer teleworkable jobs in transport, commerce, hospitality and construction, workers in these sectors are most likely to never work from home.

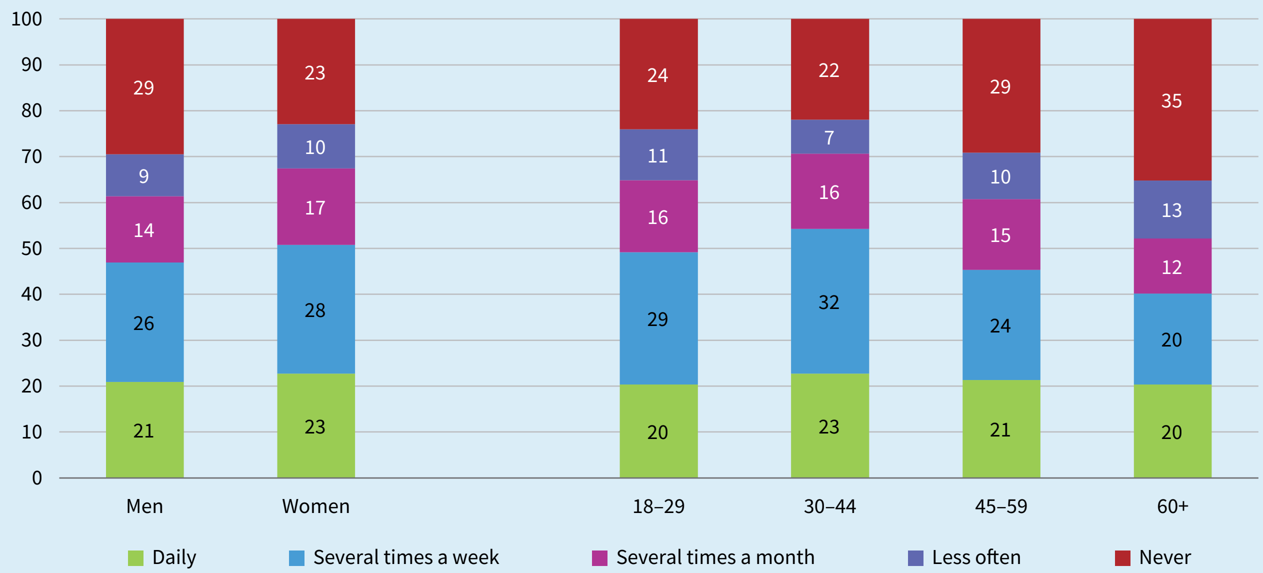
Working entirely from home is more common among women than among men (14% compared to 10%), while the frequency of hybrid work is similar (18% compared to 19%). Across age groups, people aged 60 or over are most likely to always work from home (16%), while hybrid work is most common among 30- to 44-year-olds (23%). People with children under 12 are most likely to work entirely from home (14%) or in a hybrid way (23%), when compared with people having older children or no children in the household.

Both women and men express a strong preference for hybrid working

Despite the gradual return to the workplace for the majority of workers, the preference to work from home, at least partially, remains very strong according to the e-survey. Over 60% of both women and men would prefer to work from home at least several times per month (if there are no pandemic-related restrictions), with the preference to telework being somewhat higher among women (Figure 3).

The gap between respondents' preferred option and current place of work implies that the return to the workplace has not been entirely voluntary. Among those working exclusively in their workplace, for 54% it is their preferred option, while 36% would prefer hybrid work and 10% would prefer to work from home. Conversely, among full-time teleworkers, for 62% it is their first preference, while 22% would prefer a hybrid arrangement and 8% would prefer to

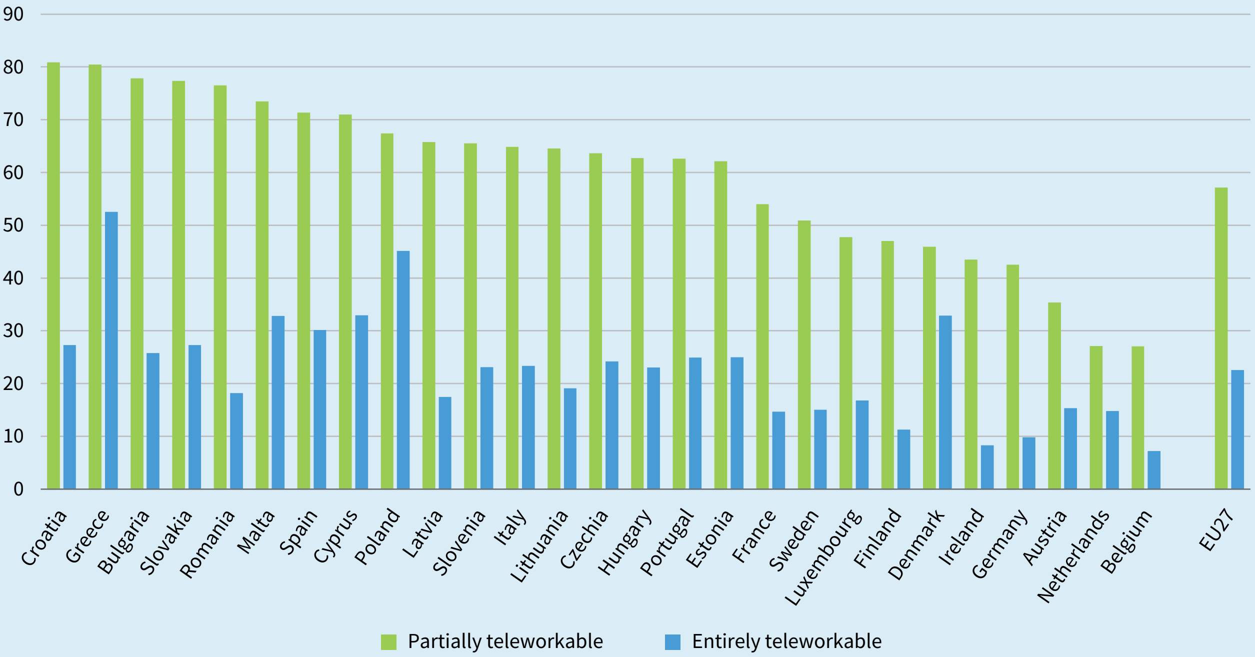
Figure 3: Preference to work from home by sex and age (%)



7 The Guardian (2020), 'Working from home is proving to be a revolution in our way of life', 26 October.

8 More information on the e-survey data collection, https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/topic/covid-19#s-04

Figure 4: Proportion of people in teleworkable jobs who never telework (%)



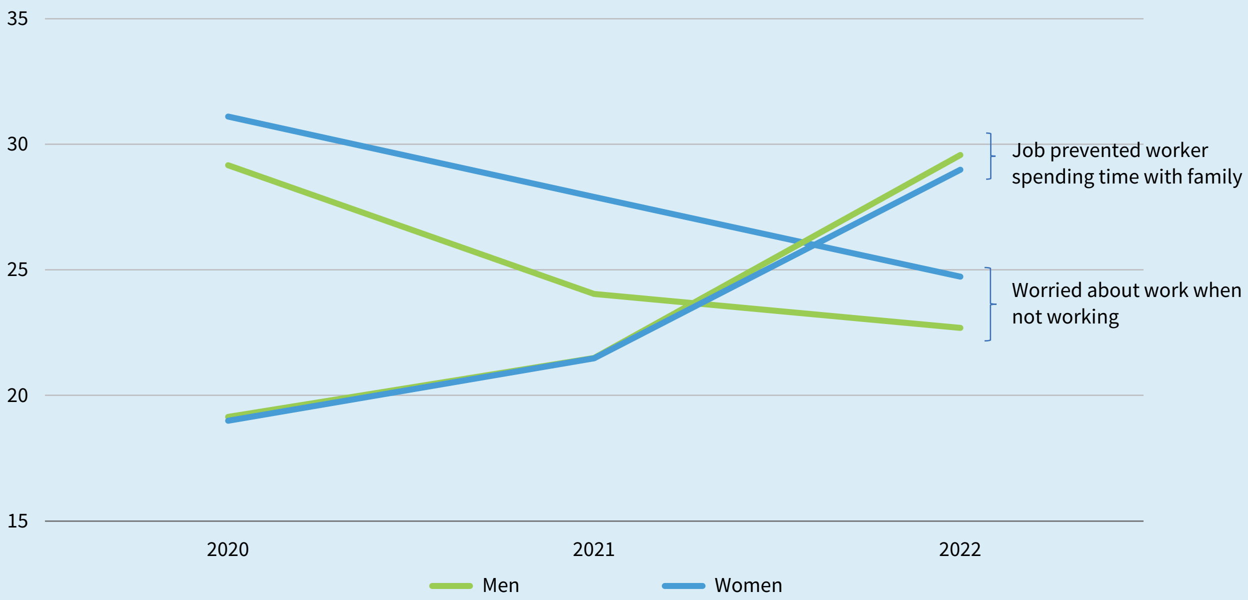
never or rarely work from home. Among hybrid workers, 66% are satisfied with the arrangement, while 22% would prefer to telework and 12% to work in the workplace.

When asked whether their job could theoretically be done from home, just over one in five (22%) workers in the e-survey say their job is entirely teleworkable, and an additional 28% say it is partially teleworkable. Among workers in wholly teleworkable jobs, 43% work exclusively from home and 34% work in a hybrid arrangement; among those whose job is perceived to be partially teleworkable, just 8% work exclusively from home and 35% work partially from home. In eastern and southern Member states, it is more common to work entirely in the workplace even when the jobs are teleworkable than is the case in other countries (Figure 4).

Clearer boundaries between work and life emerge, but worries relating to home life worsen with less time spent with family

As many people have returned to the office and the schools and childcare facilities have reopened, there has been some improvement in work–life balance, particularly in terms of the overlap between work and family life that occurred during the pandemic. People are less worried about work, for example, in spring 2020, 31% of women and 29% of men said they continued to worry about work 'most of the time' when not working; this had dropped to 25% and 23% respectively by spring 2022 (Figure 5). Similarly, in the early months of the pandemic in spring 2020, 17% of women and 18% of men worked in their free

Figure 5: Work–life balance mismatches by sex (% 'all' or 'most of the time')



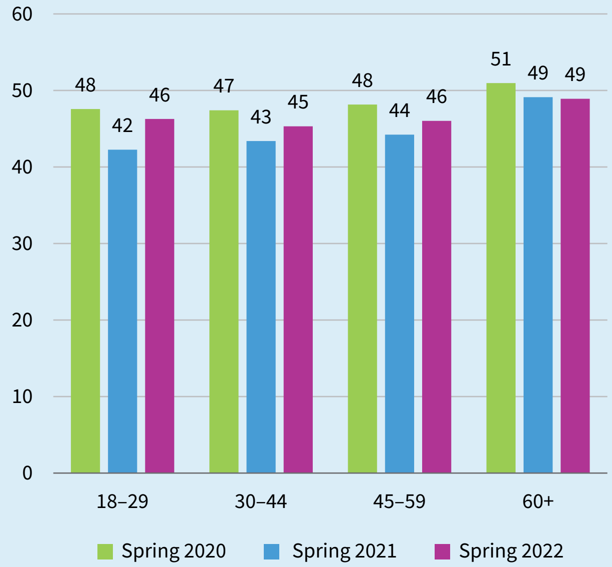
time every day or every other day; this had fallen to 12% and 14% by 2022.

On the other hand, the level of work–life balance worries related to home life has gotten worse: in 2020, 20% of men and 25% of women reported they were too tired to do household jobs after work; while the equivalent figures for 2022 are 32% and 41% respectively. In addition, the latest round of the e-survey indicates a sharp decline in family time among workers: in 2020, 19% of both men and women reported that their job prevented them from spending time with their family; in 2022, 30% of men and 29% of women expressed this opinion.

Youth mental well-being improves, but ongoing mental health crisis may be related to war in Ukraine

The pandemic and its related restriction measures have been associated with a decline in mental well-being, particularly for young people.[9] Even though most EU countries had lifted their COVID-19 restrictions by spring 2022, mental well-being has not recovered to the level that might have been expected, according to the latest round of the e-survey. Measured on the WHO-5 scale,[10] the average level of mental well-being in the EU is 47 (on a scale of 0 to 100) – a slight improvement on the level recorded in 2021 (45) but below the level measured at the start of the pandemic (49).

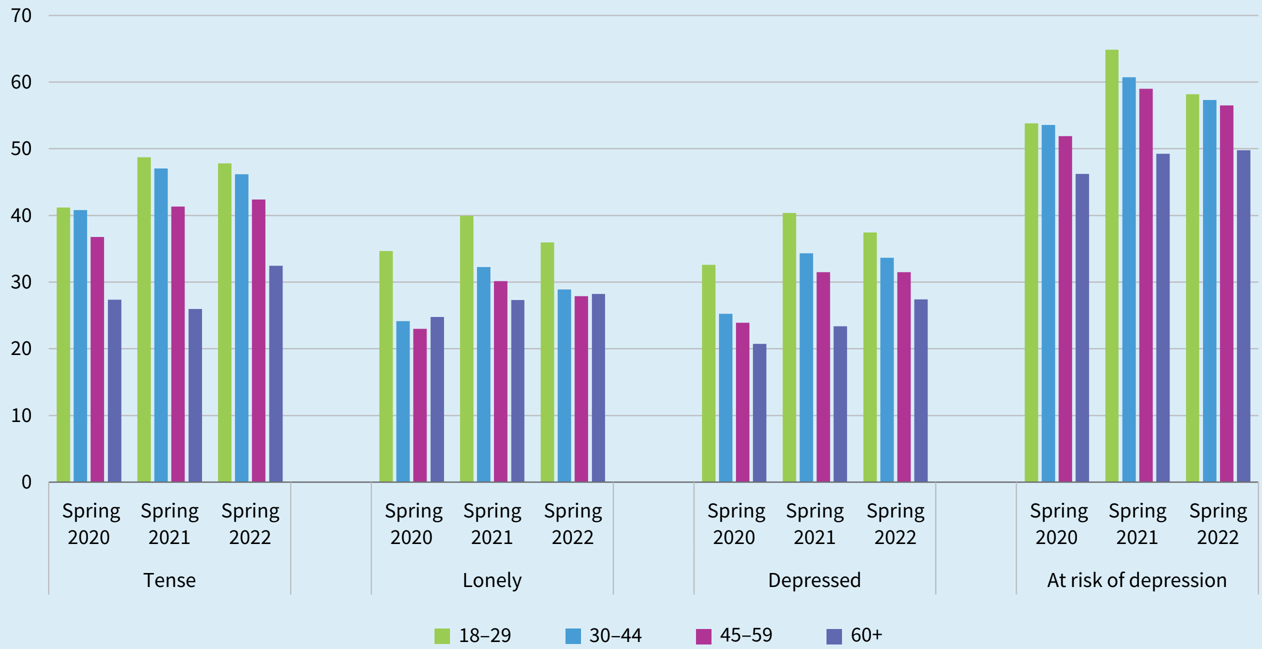
Figure 6: Mental well-being by age category (scale 1–100)



Note: *Based on WHO-5 mental well-being index. Measured on a scale of 0-100, where a higher value represents better mental well-being*

When looking at mental well-being across different age groups (Figure 6), the most significant improvement can be seen among the youngest group (18–29 years), while

Figure 7: Negative feelings and risk of depression by age category (%)



Note: *At risk of depression is defined as people with a WHO-5 score of 50 or below.*

9 Eurofound (2021), Impact of COVID-19 on young people in the EU

10 The WHO-5 mental well-being index measures people's moods over the previous two weeks based on five statements of positive feelings, on a scale of 0 to 100. The statements are: 'I have felt cheerful and in good spirits', 'I have felt calm and relaxed', 'I have felt active and vigorous', 'I woke up feeling fresh and rested', 'My daily life has been filled with things that interest me'.

there has been no improvement among those aged 60 or over, although the oldest group still has the best mental well-being of all the age groups (as was the case throughout the pandemic). This is in line with previous findings that the effects of restrictions on mental well-being were strongest among younger people.

In order to gauge mental well-being, the e-survey measured the frequency of negative feelings and the risk of depression among workers of different ages (Figure 7). While the latest e-survey findings show that there are some improvements in mental well-being among the youngest age group (18–29 years), this cohort still has the lowest mental well-being of all the groups. For older age groups, the improvement is smaller, and for those aged 60 or older, there has been a marked deterioration in mental health. Feeling tense ('all', 'most' or 'more than half of the time') has remained almost as common in 2022 as in 2021 for most age groups, while it increased from 26% to 32% over this period among those aged 60 or over. Some of this increase could be attributed to a general feeling of malaise or anxiety about the war in Ukraine, which broke out shortly before the e-survey was launched.

Figure 8: Proportion of people at risk of depression among selected groups (%)

Note: *At risk of depression is defined as people with a WHO-5 score of 50 or below.*

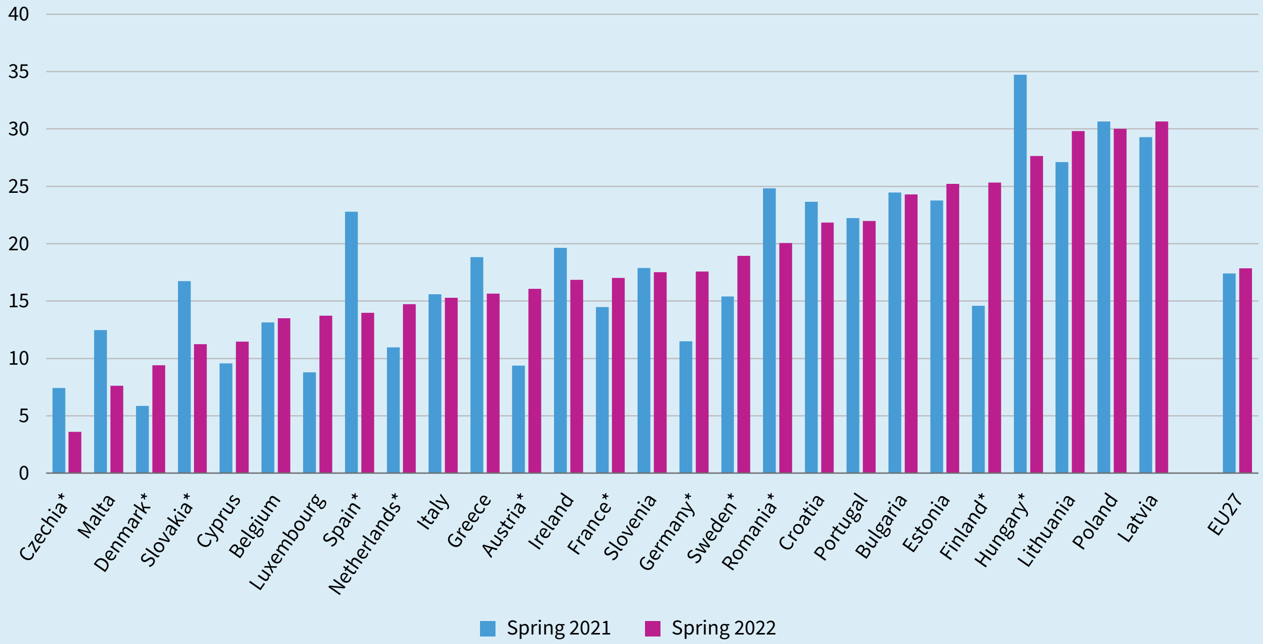
Figure 8 depicts the frequency of the risk of depression among selected social groups over the two years of the pandemic, as measured by the e-survey. The proportion of people at risk of depression has fallen for some groups for whom it had been especially high, such as unemployed people (from 76% in 2021 to 69% in 2022), while there was a much smaller improvement among other groups, such as people with difficulties making ends meet (from 78% in 2021 to 75% in 2022). Progress in this area has been less significant for women than for men.

Almost one in five respondents has unmet healthcare needs

The pandemic has put an immense strain on Europe's healthcare systems. Many non-essential healthcare services were paused, postponed or significantly altered. COVID-19 exacerbated an already stressful occupation: with an endless stream of cases, healthcare workers were put under extraordinary pressure.

The e-survey results provide evidence of the extreme impact of COVID-19 on healthcare provision. In spring 2022, nearly a fifth of respondents (18%) report having a medical issue for which they have not yet received treatment. On average, healthcare systems in the EU in spring 2022 had not managed to catch up with the backlog that accumulated during the pandemic, with unmet needs remaining as high as in spring 2021. However, as Figure 9 shows, the picture is mixed from country to country, with improvements evident among respondents in some EU Member States (for example, Hungary, Malta, Romania, Slovakia and Spain) while unmet healthcare needs increased among respondents in other countries (for example, Austria, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden). The three countries where respondents reported the highest level of unmet needs in 2022 are Latvia (31%), Poland and Lithuania (both 30%).

Figure 9: Unmet healthcare needs by country, EU27 (%)



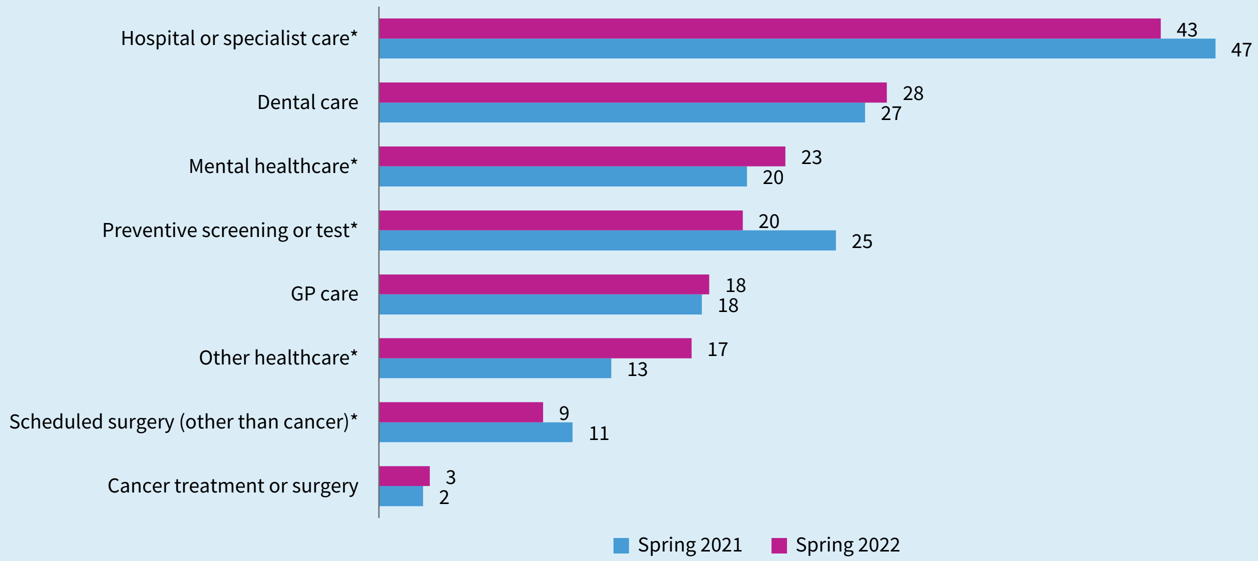
Note: **Denotes countries having a statistically significant difference (p=0.05) compared to spring 2021.*

In the e-survey, the healthcare backlog is highest for non-specified hospital or specialist care (43% in 2022), followed by dental care (28%) and mental healthcare (23%) – see Figure 10. Compared to spring 2021, fewer issues are reported for preventive screenings and tests and hospital or specialist care. The situation has deteriorated for mental healthcare and for other healthcare issues.

Unmet mental healthcare needs on the rise among female respondents

Data from the fifth e-survey shows that almost one in four women (24%) in spring 2022 report unmet mental healthcare needs, up from one in five (21%) in spring 2021. The problem is less widespread among men, both in 2021 (18%) and in 2022 (19%).

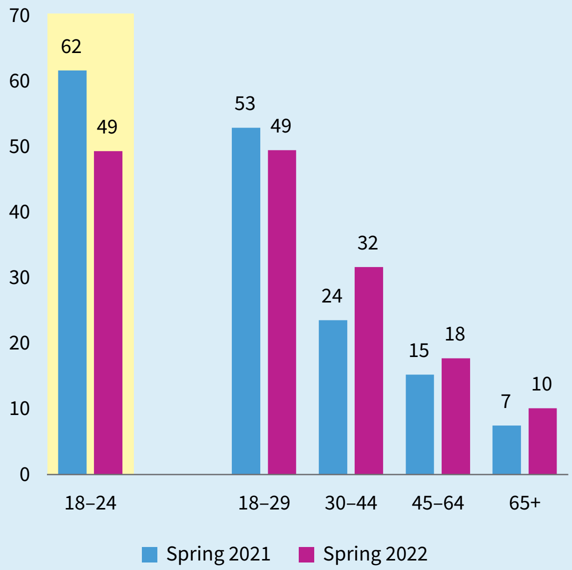
Figure 10: Unmet needs for healthcare by type of healthcare, EU27 (%)



Note: **Denotes a statistically significant difference (p=0.05) compared to spring 2021.*

In terms of age profile, the alarmingly high number of respondents in the youngest age group that reported unmet mental healthcare needs in spring 2021 has dropped, although it remains very high (from 62% to 49% in 2022) – see Figure 11.

Figure 11: Unmet needs for mental healthcare by age category, EU27 (%)



Note: *All changes between spring 2021 and spring 2022 are statistically significant (p=0.05).*

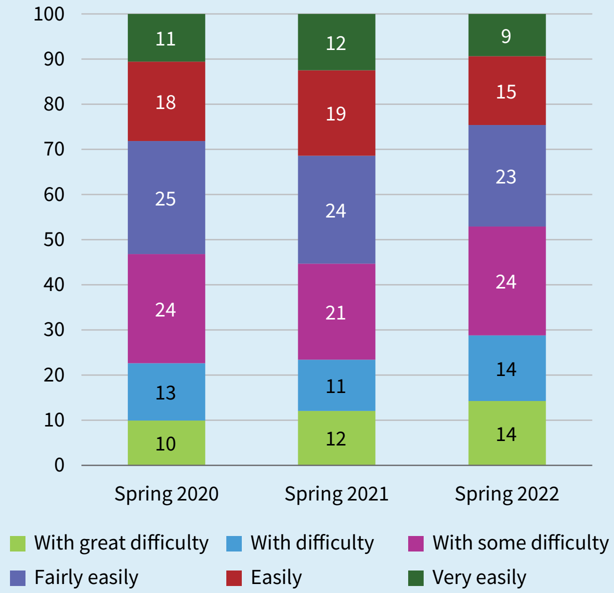
The gap between respondents with and without disabilities has also narrowed. However, respondents with a disability (25%; -1pp since spring 2021) continue to report unmet needs in mental healthcare more often than those without a disability (17%; +5pp).

Impact on people's financial situation

Rise in cost of living triggers upsurge in financial difficulties

The cost of living in the EU is rising at an unprecedented level, with an average inflation rate across the 27 EU Member States of nearly 8% in March 2022, mostly caused by soaring energy prices.[11] Evidence that the increasing cost of living is affecting people's financial situation comes from the finding that 53% of e-survey respondents reported that in spring 2022 their household has difficulties making ends meet – a considerable increase on the 45% reported in 2021 and 47% at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Ability to make ends meet by level of difficulty, EU27 (%)



Note: *The e-survey question is: 'A household may have different sources of income and more than one household member may contribute to it. Thinking of your household's total monthly income, is your household able to make ends meet...?'*

The e-survey also shows that except for payments related to a person's rent or mortgage, payment problems in spring 2022 have become more common among respondents.

Energy poverty is challenging for vulnerable households

16% of respondents in spring 2022 report being in arrears with their utility bills (Table 1). Furthermore, 28% expect their household will have difficulties in the next three months, while 31% of households with a car anticipate having difficulties to pay for the costs to keep it up and running.

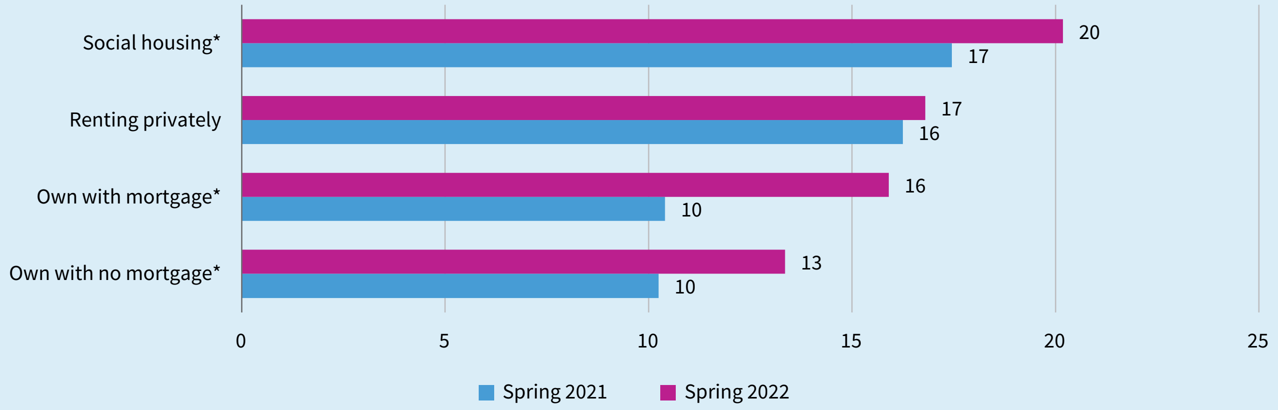
Table 1: Proportion of respondents reporting arrears, EU27 (%)

	Spring 2020	Spring 2021	Spring 2022
Utility bills*	11	13	16
Consumer loans*	10	10	11
Telephone/mobile/internet	9	10	11
Healthcare/insurance*	7	8	11
Informal loans*	9	8	10
Rent/mortgage	8	8	8

Note: **Denotes a statistically significant difference (p=0.05) between 2021 and 2022.*

11 See Eurostat (2022), Euroindicators No. 51, 29 April, Euro area annual inflation up to 7.5%

Figure 13: Proportion of respondents with utility bill arrears by housing status, EU27 (%)



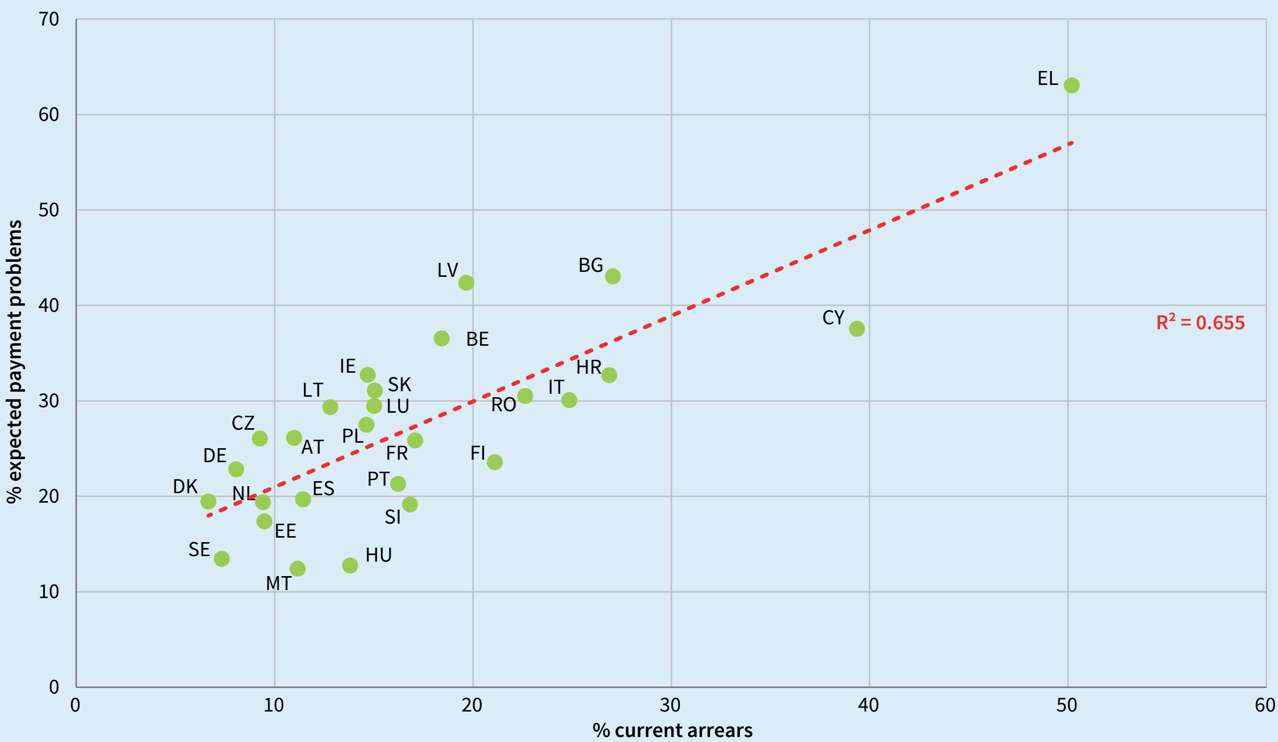
Note: **Denotes a statistically significant change (p=0.05) compared to spring 2021.*

Energy poverty is a problem that affects a considerable number of financially vulnerable households. Among e-survey households that have difficulties making ends meet, 28% are in arrears with their utility bills and 45% are worried they will not be able to pay their utility bills in the next three months. Among households that are already in arrears with their utility bills, 74% express concern that they will not be able to pay their bill in the next three months. While being in arrears with utility bills tends to be more common among respondents living in social housing, even respondents who have paid off their mortgage report problems in this respect compared to the previous year (Figure 13).

Similarly, in spring 2022, respondents living in rural areas report utility bill arrears more often than urban dwellers (18% compared to 14%, respectively); however, in the same period, the incidence of such debts has become more prevalent both among urban and rural dwellers (both +3 percentage points compared to spring 2021).

Finally, a comparison of the country results shows that the extent to which energy poverty affects respondents varies greatly according to their country of residence. The proportion of respondents reporting being behind with their utility bills ranges from 7% in Denmark and Sweden to 50% in Greece. Regarding the concern among e-survey respondents that they may have difficulties paying their bills in the next three months, this ranges from 12% in Malta to over 40% in Latvia and Bulgaria. In Greece, as many as 63% of e-survey respondents express concerns in this regard. As Figure 14 shows, there is a strong correlation between being in arrears and worrying about future difficulties.

Figure 14: Correlation between current utility bill arrears and expected payment problems by country (%)



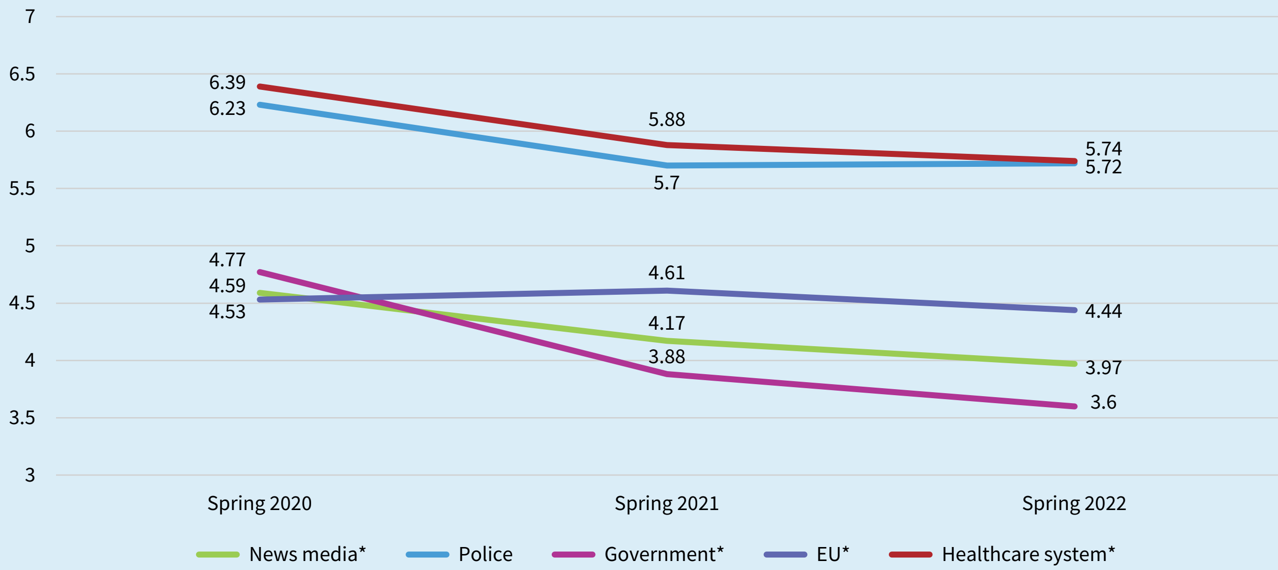
Impact on social cohesion and trust

Fall in trust levels for all institutions

Institutions have had to adapt to the new reality brought about by the pandemic. According to the 'rally around the flag' effect, citizens tend to be more supportive of institutions at the start of a crisis - as was the case when COVID-19 first appeared in spring 2020.[12] As the crisis recedes, however, the effect dissipates and initial levels of trust return to pre-emergency levels. The e-survey highlights a similar trend. Following almost two years of restrictions, the e-survey results reveal a fixed decline in trust across all institutions, including national governments, the EU and healthcare systems. Trust in the police remained consistent in 2021 and 2022, although both years recorded lower values than in spring 2020 (Figure 15a).

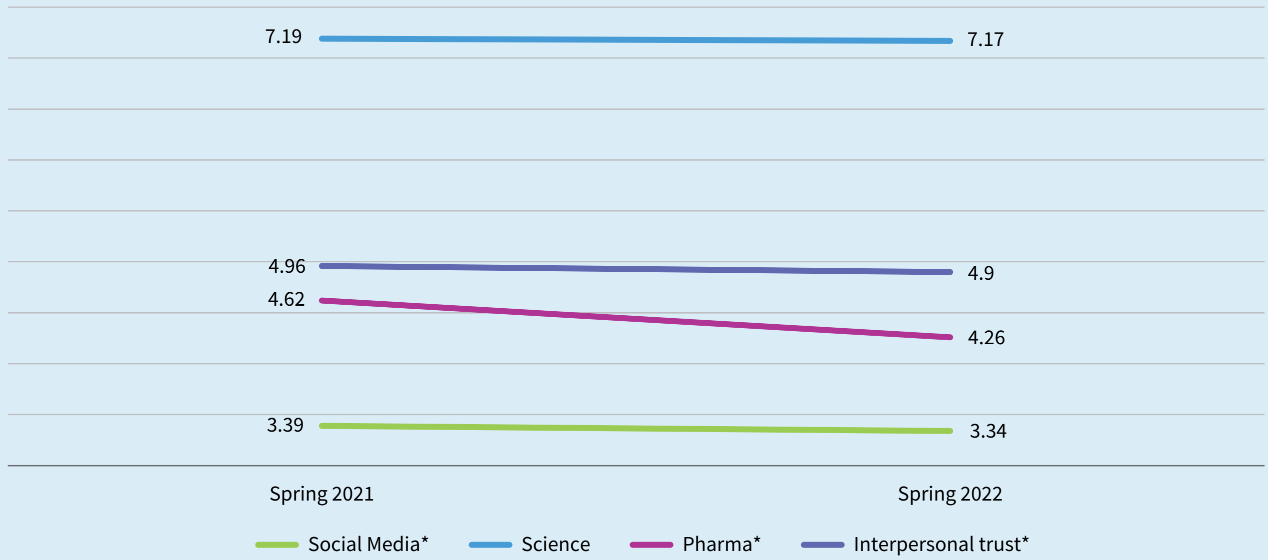
As regards trust in science, there was no significant change over the one-year period and the level stayed relatively high, whereas trust in pharmaceutical firms, social media and other people had declined by spring 2022 (Figure 15b).

Figure 15a: Trust in institutions – mean scores (scale 1–10), EU27



Notes: **Denotes a statistically significant difference (p=0.05) compared to spring 2021. The e-survey question was: 'Please answer on a scale of 1–10 how much you personally trust each of the following institutions'. 1 – Do not trust at all; 10 –Trust completely.*

Figure 15b: Trust in institutions – spring 2021 questions – mean scores (scale 1–10), EU27



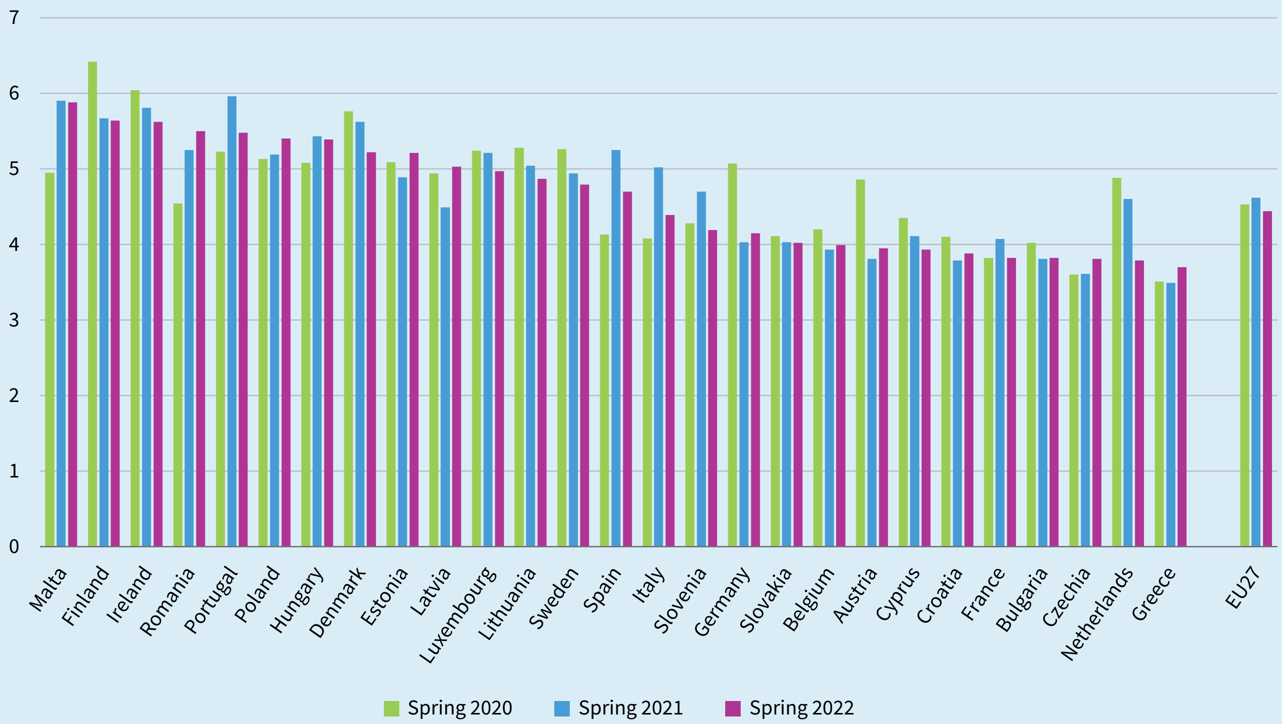
Notes: **Denotes a statistically significant difference (p=0.05) compared to spring 2021. The e-survey question was: 'Please answer on a scale of 1–10 how much you personally trust each of the following institutions'. 1 – Do not trust at all; 10 –Trust completely.*

12 Filsinger, M., Freitag, M., Erhardt, J., & Wamsler, S. (2021), 'Rally around your fellows: Information and social trust in a real-world experiment during the corona crisis', *The Social Science Journal*, 1–15.

Trust in the EU still higher than trust in national governments

The e-survey shows that overall, trust in the EU is higher than trust in government (4.44 and 3.60 in spring 2022, respectively). However trust in the EU is not the same for all Member States. As Figure 16 illustrates, in some countries, such as Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Austria and Netherlands, respondents recorded the greatest decline in trust levels in the EU in spring 2022 when compared to spring 2020. Conversely, in countries such as Romania, Spain, Italy and Greece, respondents started from low scores in spring 2020 and recorded higher results in 2022. Although trust in the EU decreased in the first group of countries, levels are still relatively high when compared to the EU average (for example, Finland and Denmark scoring 5.64 and 5.22 respectively). Conversely, in countries where the score improved such as Spain (4.70), Italy (4.39) and Greece (3.70) the base started from far lower scores in spring 2020, to almost reach the EU27 average.

Figure 16: Trust in the EU by country and e-survey round – mean scores (scale 1–10), EU27



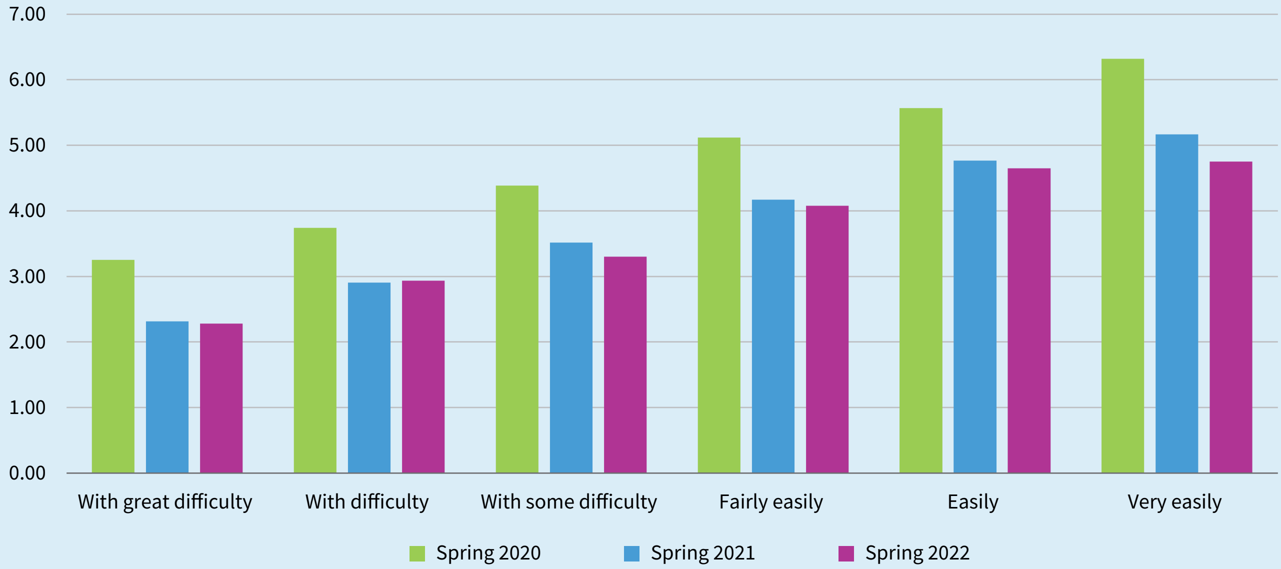
Notes: *For information on the e-survey question, see notes to Figure 15.*

Trust levels converge among different financial groups

The pandemic affected social groups differently. Spring 2021 and 2022 saw an erosion of trust in national governments across all households regardless of their ability to make ends meet (Figure 17). Different factors can play a role in the decline in trust levels, especially in times of economic hardship. Factors such as the war in Ukraine and the rise in inflation and energy prices could explain the lower levels of trust in spring 2022.

Nevertheless, the biggest downward shift in trust in national governments occurred among respondents who can make ends meet 'very easily'. It represents the biggest change recorded between e-survey rounds among different financial situations. Although still visible, the difference in trust in national governments between those who can easily make ends meet and those who struggle is gradually diminishing. The wealthier groups of respondents are losing trust in the government in greater proportions than less affluent groups, resulting in a more widespread sense of distrust towards the government.

Figure 17: Trust in national government by ability to make ends meet (scale 1–10)



Notes: *For information on the e-survey question, see notes to Figure 15.*

A more stable picture is found when looking at levels of trust in the EU according to the financial situation of households (Figure 18). There were no dramatic increases or decreases in trust in 2020 or 2021. The findings show that respondents struggling to make ends meet trust the EU less than wealthier groups, but differences are less accentuated, and trends do not fluctuate as much as trust in government. Only small differences are discernible across the two-year period, with a small decrease in trust among those with difficulties in making ends meet and a slight improvement among wealthier groups.

Figure 18: Trust in the EU by ability to make ends meet and e-survey round (scale 1–10)

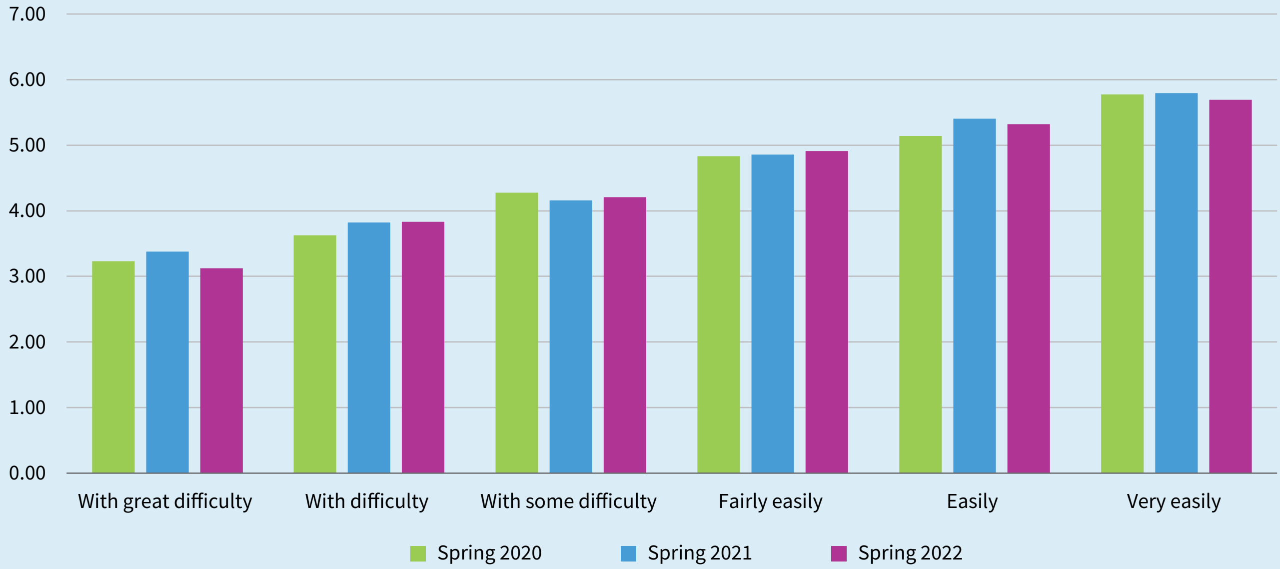


Figure 19: Trust in national government by employment status (scale 1–10)

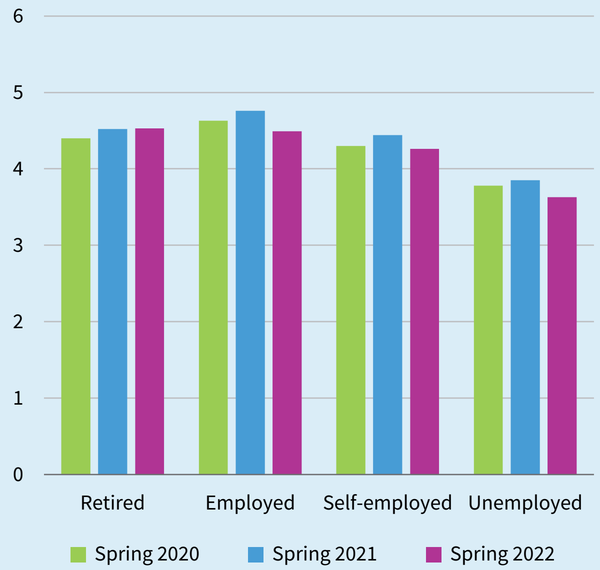
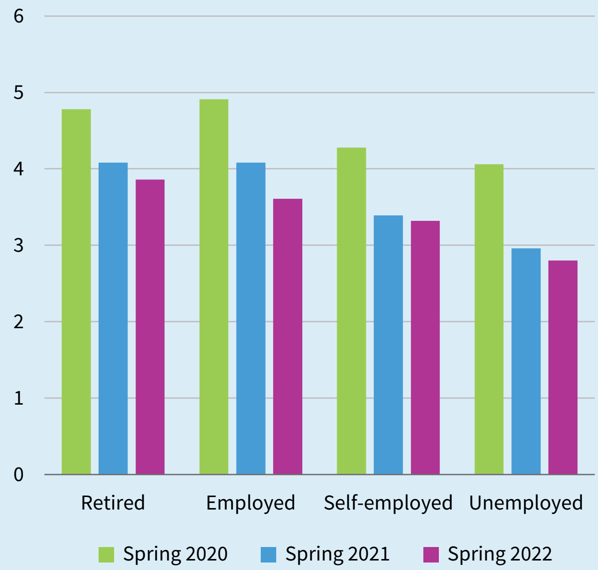


Figure 20: Trust in the EU by employment status (scale 1–10)



Lowest level of trust found among unemployed respondents

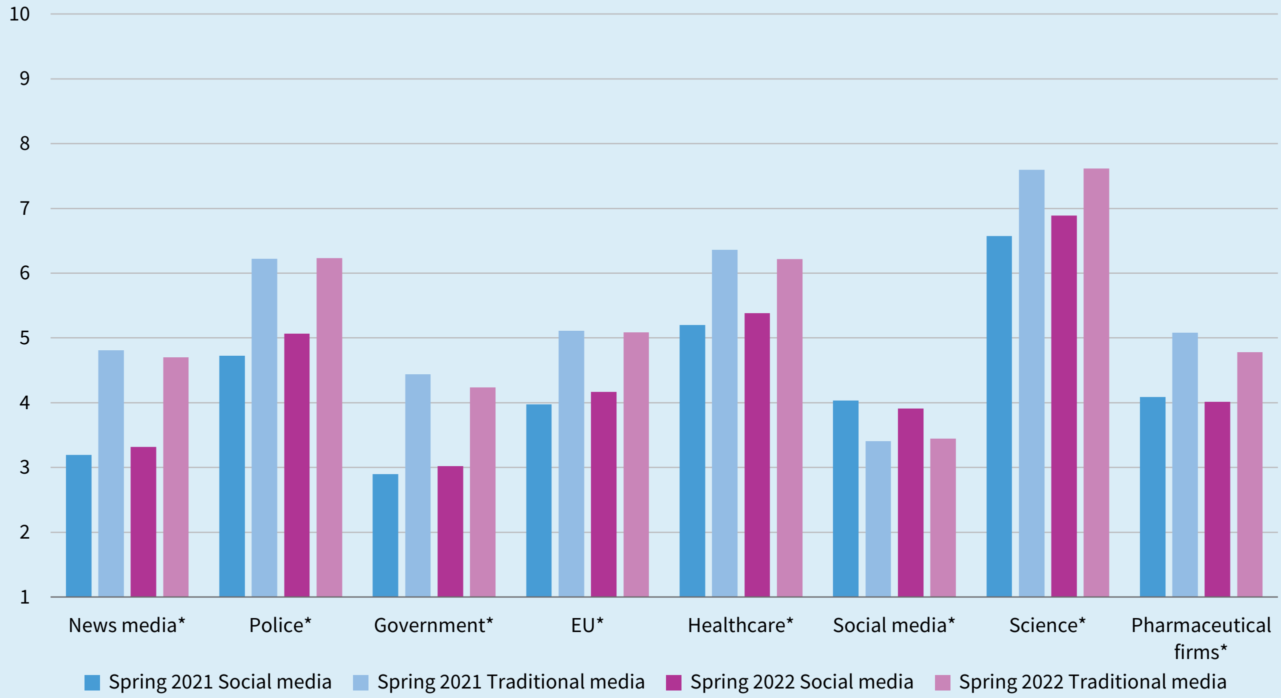
Looking at trust among respondents of different employment status, there were sizeable differences depending on whether they were retired, employed, homemakers, students, unable to work or unemployed. In all the e-survey rounds, unemployed respondents consistently had lower trust in the national government and in the EU compared to the other groups. However, in spring 2022, a decrease in trust in the government is noticeable across all groups – and is particularly acute for unemployed respondents (Figure 19). The pattern for trust in the EU is slightly different: there is a small increase in spring 2021, with lower scores for all groups in spring 2022 (Figure 20).

When social media is the preferred news source, trust plummets

Since the spring 2021 round, the e-survey has included questions related to social media, in particular regarding the respondent's preferred news source and the amount of time spent on social media. Social media, as compared to traditional media, allows for a faster dissemination of news and a wider resonance of the news content.[13] One of the pitfalls of such easy access is that some news published on social media is unverified, which could lead to misinformation. The low entry-level barriers of social media means that less authoritative sources can enter the news marketplace, leading to a mix of fact-checked information with less reliable news. Moreover, as social media news is often less moderate than traditional media news, louder and conflicting voices tend to resonate more. As clearly shown in Figure 21, respondents who chose social media as their preferred news source have lower trust in established institutions than respondents who use traditional media, with the biggest difference found in regard to trust in government and trust in news media.

13 Allcott, H. and Gentzkow, M. (2017), 'Social media and fake news in the 2016 election', *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 31, No.2, pp. 211–236.

Figure 21: Trust in institutions by preferred news source – mean scores (scale 1–10), EU27



Notes: **Statistically significant difference (p=0.05) between preferred news source when controlling for rounds.*

Vaccine-hesitant respondents have lower trust in institutions and the gap is increasing

Vaccines against COVID-19 became available at the beginning of 2021. Over a year later, more than 80% of respondents in the EU report they have been vaccinated against COVID-19.

Despite the high vaccination rates across all EU Member States, during 2021 some people began to voice their concern regarding the safety of vaccines and discontent with the vaccination policies implemented by their governments. The analysis of the e-survey provides insight into the characteristics of vaccine-hesitant citizens and their social and political behaviour.

In general, vaccine-hesitant respondents have much lower trust in institutions than those who are vaccinated. Interesting trends can be noted between spring 2021 and spring 2022. By spring 2022, after a large-scale vaccination campaign in all countries, not taking the vaccine meant being truly vaccine-hesitant. In spring 2021, there was some limited difference in terms of trust in government between vaccinated (4.36 points out of 10) and not vaccinated (3.86 points) respondents. By spring 2022, the difference had widened considerably. The score for trust in government was higher among vaccinated respondents than among those that are vaccine hesitant (4.0 out of 10 compared to 1.8).

A similar pattern can be observed with regard to trust in the EU: in spring 2021, levels of trust for the vaccinated (5.26) and not vaccinated (4.58) respondents were about the same. In spring 2022, however, the gap widened to show a trust score of 5 for vaccinated respondents compared to 2.3 for the non-vaccinated. When asked if they were satisfied with the way democracy works in their country in spring 2022, 75% of non-vaccinated respondents had low or very low satisfaction; the share was much lower (34%) among the vaccinated.

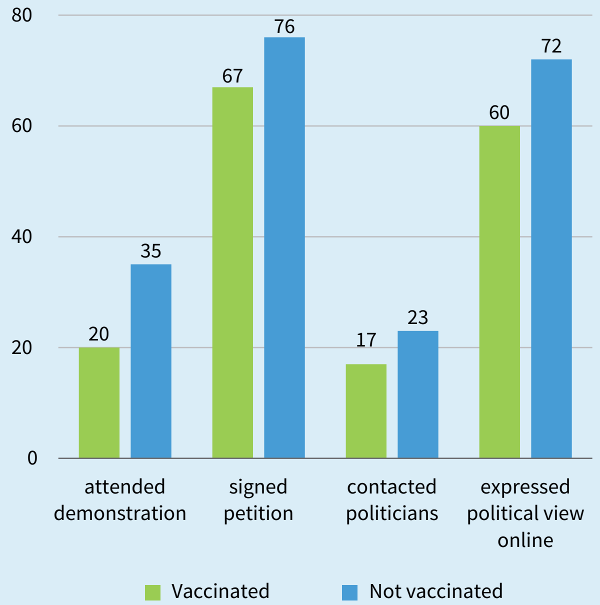
While the drivers of vaccine hesitancy are complex and well discussed in the literature,[14] the results of the e-survey highlight the strong importance of news sources. The divide between traditional media and social media is multi-faceted and well-documented. Traditional media is more likely to rely on official scientific sources, whereas social media is more prone to misinformation. Results from the e-survey show that only 11% of those who mainly consume traditional news media are vaccine-hesitant. Conversely, the share increases to 32% among respondents who mainly consume news on social media and to 37% among those who did not follow the news at all.

During the past few years, people opposing vaccines and vaccination policies of various kinds made the headlines for their demonstrations and tenacious online activism.

14 Mascherini, M. and Nivakoski, S., (2022), 'Social media use and vaccine hesitancy in the European Union', *Vaccine*, Vol. 40, no. 14, pp. 2215-2225.

This behaviour is captured in the spring 2022 round of the e-survey through its questions on political participation and engagement. The findings reveal a notable amount of political engagement among unvaccinated compared to vaccinated respondents (Figure 22).

Figure 22: Political participation by vaccination status – mean scores, EU27 (%)



Notes: *Data retrieved from spring 2022. The e-survey asked the following question: Over the last 12 months, have you done any of the following activities?*

While only a small fraction of vaccinated respondents (20%) attended a demonstration in the last year, the share almost doubles among the non-vaccinated (35%). Similarly, non-vaccinated respondents were more politically active compared to vaccinated ones in terms of signing petitions, contacting politicians and expressing their political views online.

Although non-vaccinated respondents seem more politically active than vaccinated respondents and are more confident in their ability to participate in politics (23% against 17%), they are less likely to have voted in the last elections (82% against 88%, respectively).

The results would seem to point to the emergence of a group of non-vaccinated citizens who have low trust in the current institutions; are highly politically engaged, with 72% expressing their political views online; and are confident in their ability to participate in politics.

Top 10 findings

- Despite the lifting of most COVID-19 restrictions across EU Member States by spring 2022, **mental well-being levels remain lower than they were at the start of the pandemic.** This could be attributed to the war in Ukraine for which 76% of respondents expressed high or very high concern.
- The return to the workplace continued across the EU as public health restrictions were lifted and, by spring 2022, the findings show that very **few respondents still worked exclusively from home**. However, respondents voice a **clear preference for teleworking**, implying that the return has not been entirely voluntary.
- A **clearer work-life balance** has emerged in 2022, with fewer people working in their free time; however in terms of home life, workers have reported **less time with family**.
- There continues to be widespread **unmet healthcare needs** in the EU, affecting almost one in five respondents (18%): the backlog in care is highest for hospital and specialist care. Unmet mental healthcare needs have increased since spring 2021, especially for women, where almost a quarter (24%) reported unmet mental healthcare needs.
- With the rising cost of living, a considerable number of financially vulnerable households are **at risk of energy poverty**. 28% of respondents report living in a household with difficulties making ends meet and being in arrears with their utility bills, while 45% of this group are worried they will not be able to pay their utility bills over the next three months.
- During the pandemic, **trust across all institutions** has steadily fallen among e-survey respondents. Factors such as the war in Ukraine and the rise in inflation and energy appear to be exacerbating this trend. In some countries such as Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Austria and the Netherlands, respondents are reporting the lowest levels of trust in spring 2022 compared to spring 2020.
- **Unemployed respondents consistently reported lower trust** in government and in the EU compared to the other groups, and trust is also lower among respondents living in households that have difficulties making ends meet. Respondents in financially more secure positions are becoming less trusting in the government, reflecting a more widespread dissatisfaction among the electorate.
- In general, **vaccine-hesitant respondents have much lower trust in institutions** than those who are vaccinated, and this gap has widened since 2021.
- V**accine hesitancy is much higher among respondents who have low trust in institutions, who mainly get their news from social media or who do not follow the news at all.** Vaccine-hesitant people appear to be an emerging group of citizens who are highly politically engaged.

- The findings show that **when social media is the preferred news source, trust plummets**, with the biggest difference in trust apparent in news media and trust in government. As the war in Ukraine rages on, combating the spread of misinformation to avoid undermining the stability of governments and the EU will be one of Europe's biggest challenges during this period.

Conclusions

Europe and the world have changed dramatically since the first COVID-19 cases appeared in the EU in early 2020. With the fast development and rollout of vaccines and boosters, society across Europe has re-opened following two years of limiting restrictions. Any opportunity, however, for society and the economy to recuperate from the COVID-19 pandemic has been abruptly put on hold by the onset of the war in Ukraine in March 2022. And consequently, Europe is grappling with inflation levels reminiscent of the 1970s, that have led to sharp increases in the cost of living. This new reality means that many respondents continue to express uncertainty about their living and working conditions. With the re-opening of society, many hoped that mental well-being would improve; however, in spring 2022, the risk of depression remains worryingly high for many people. In particular, the e-survey points to the widespread uncertainty faced by financially vulnerable households, for whom energy poverty is either already a reality or is looming around the corner.

On the work front, it is evident that with the reopening of society, people would return to their place of work. While it was widely predicted that teleworking was here to stay, and that the pandemic would trigger a work-from-home revolution that would change the future of work permanently, by spring 2022 many e-survey respondents were working exclusively at their workplace again. Yet the preference of respondents seems to have been to continue to telework – daily or several times a week – and the proportion expressing this preference is highest among those aged 30–44 years who typically have young children.

The re-opening of schools and childcare facilities has reduced the extreme work–life balance conflicts that respondents were forced to deal with during the pandemic, but old patterns re-appear, and new challenges emerge. Evidence from the e-survey shows an increase in worries relating to home life, with workers feeling that their job prevents them from spending time with their family. This reported decline in family time was highest not only among respondents working from the office, but also among hybrid workers.

Another new reality brought on by the pandemic is the widespread backlog in healthcare provision, particularly with regards to hospital and specialist care. Clearly, the system needs support to cope with the high levels of mental healthcare problems, as the e-survey points to an increase in unmet mental healthcare. Thankfully, the alarmingly high number of respondents in the youngest age group (18-24) who reported unmet healthcare needs in 2021 (62%) has fallen somewhat in 2022 (49%).

The challenges brought on by the crisis, which will mark the 2020s, places huge pressure on national and supra-national institutions to have the support of its citizens. One concerning finding from the latest round of the e-survey is that groups that previously exhibited higher trust levels in governments, such as those in financially more secure positions, are becoming less trusting, reflecting widespread dissatisfaction among the electorate. At the same time, the e-survey shows vaccine hesitant respondents as having low trust in the current institutions, being politically engaged and confident in their ability to participate in politics. The e-survey reveals that respondents who chose social media as their preferred news source have lower trust in established institutions than those who use traditional media sources, with the biggest difference found with regard to trust in news media and trust in government. Therefore, in light of the devastating situation brought about by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, one of the biggest challenges for governments during this crisis period will be to combat the spread of misinformation and fake news in order to avoid undermining the stability of governments and the European Union.

The 5th round of the *Living, working and COVID-19* e-survey asked respondents their view of the war in Ukraine. For further information see, Eurofound survey reveals widespread support for Ukraine

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Further information

Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey data

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