

Statistical bulletin

Coronavirus and the social impacts on households in subnational areas in Great Britain: 2020 and 2021

Indicators from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Opinions and Lifestyle Survey to understand the impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on different households in subnational areas in Great Britain.

Contact:
Esther Akleh-Amankwah
cities@ons.gov.uk
+44(0)1633 582587

Release date:
27 April 2021

Next release:
To be announced

Notice

27 April 2021

The statistician's comment has been updated to better reflect the main points presented by this bulletin. No other changes have been made.

Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Understanding the impact on society](#)
3. [Avoiding physical contact and leaving home](#)
4. [Leaving home for work and working from home](#)
5. [Concern about the effect of the pandemic on life](#)
6. [Ability to afford an unexpected expense](#)
7. [Perceptions of the future](#)
8. [Social impacts on Great Britain data](#)
9. [Glossary](#)
10. [Measuring the data](#)
11. [Strengths and limitations](#)
12. [Related links](#)

1 . Main points

- Adults aged over 65 years were less likely to leave their homes during important periods within the last year and were more cautious in avoiding physical contact with others when they did; the highest proportion of this was seen in Wales in the early 2021 lockdown period and in the North West and North East in summer 2020.
- Working from home became a reality for working age adults throughout the pandemic, especially in London; the biggest increase in adults who reported working from home was seen in Scotland and the West Midlands.
- Households with children most frequently reported they were worried or very worried about the effect of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on their lives, especially in London during spring 2020, where 84% of adults in these households reported this.
- Positive sentiments on when life would return to normal were highest during spring 2020, especially among adults in households with children in the North West where 71% thought life would return to normal in less than a year, compared with the national average of 62%.
- The group that experienced that biggest change in perception were single adults under 65 years; 61% reported life would be back to normal in less than a year during the spring 2020 lockdown compared with 51% during the early 2021 lockdown; adults in Yorkshire and The Humber experienced the biggest change, a 27 percentage point decrease.

Statistician's comment

“Looking across the different countries and regions of Britain, there were fewer regional differences in the impact of the pandemic than one might have anticipated. One clear exception was in London, where the proportion of people working from home was far higher than in any other region.

We did see differences in experience depending on the types of households people lived in, regardless of where they lived. For example, households with children across the nation were the most likely to report feeling worried about the effect the pandemic is having on their lives.”

James, P Harris, Cities Statistician, Office for National Statistics

2 . Understanding the impact on society

This bulletin presents data and indicators at the country and region level from a module being undertaken through the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) to understand the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on British society.

In this bulletin we examine the social impacts of coronavirus on respondents belonging to different types of private households in regions of England, and in Wales and Scotland since March 2020. Types of households are based on self-reported data and were categorised as:

- one adult, 16- to 64-years-old
- one adult, 65-years-old or older
- two adults, both 16- to 64-years-old
- two adults, at least one of whom is 65-years-old or older
- three or more adults, all ages
- households with one or more children (and any number of adults)

Additional data including measures for housing tenure (renters, mortgage, homeowners) and data on a city regions level can be found in the [associated datasets](#). Changes in results from the different time points from this bulletin are presented, associated confidence intervals should be used to assess the [statistical significance](#) of this difference.

Data coverage

The earliest data from the coronavirus module of the survey covers the period 20 March to 31 May 2020 (providing survey data for 14,030 adults) and will be referred to as “spring 2020”. From the 23 March 2020, the whole of the UK was placed under lockdown measures, with schools shut, non-essential shops closed, and the population asked to work from home where possible and to only leave their houses for exercise and essentials. These measures began to be eased from mid-May.

Data points covering 4 June 2020 to 2 August 2020 will be referred to as “summer 2020”, providing data for 15,660 adults. During this period, restrictions were relaxed in most of Great Britain, including non-essential shops reopening and social distancing restrictions eased and the introduction of the “one-metre plus” rule as pubs, cinemas and restaurants reopened.

The latest data point in this analysis covers 7 January 2021 to 28 March 2021 and will be referred to as “early-2021 lockdown”, covering responses for 52,020 adults. From 5 January 2021 the UK government announced a further national lockdown for [England](#). Similar rules applied for [Scotland](#) and [Wales](#), particularly the message to “stay at home” meaning that adults in Great Britain were under a national lockdown at the start of the year in 2021. The estimates presented here were collected before the “rule of six” was introduced in England from 29 March 2021 but include the change from “stay home” to “stay local” in Wales from 13 March.

Further information on data coverage, including response rates can be found in [Section 10: Measuring the data](#).

More about coronavirus

- Find the latest on [coronavirus \(COVID-19\) in the UK](#).
- [Explore the latest coronavirus data](#) from the ONS and other sources.
- All ONS analysis, summarised in our [coronavirus roundup](#).
- View [all coronavirus data](#).
- Find out how we are [working safely in our studies and surveys](#).

3 . Avoiding physical contact and leaving home

In summer 2020 (when this indicator was first measured), 86% of adults who had left their home in the past seven days reported that they had avoided physical contact with others outside their home. Examples of direct physical contact may include shaking or holding hands, hugging and making contact when passing objects. This changed gradually over time, with lower levels seen in late August and early September (around 80%), rising again during the [tier system and November 2020 lockdown](#). During the early 2021 lockdown, 92% reported that they had avoided contact.

In summer 2020, adults in households where at least one adult was over 65 years, or which were made up of single adults aged over 65 years, had the highest percentage of adults who reported they had avoided physical contact in most regions and countries. During this period, there was a wide range of avoidance (avoiding physical contact when outside) between different household types.

The biggest difference was in the North East, where adults in households where one adult is over 65 years (97%) and households with children (95%) were more cautious than respondents in other households. Estimates ranged from a minimum of 71% to 97% within the region. In early 2021 lockdown, avoidance levels were similar to summer 2020. This behaviour could reflect restrictions not being eased at the same pace compared with the rest of Great Britain as well as shielding of clinically and extremely vulnerable people still being in place during this period, [around two-thirds](#) of this group were aged over 60-years-old in England.

Following the summer 2020 period, levels of avoidance rose in adults across all regions and countries. The biggest change was seen in London, where the percentage of adults avoiding contact rose from 81% to 90% in early 2021 lockdown. The increase seemed to be driven by all households except households where at least one adult was over 65 or which were made up of single adults aged over 65. These adults reported similar levels of avoidance in both periods.

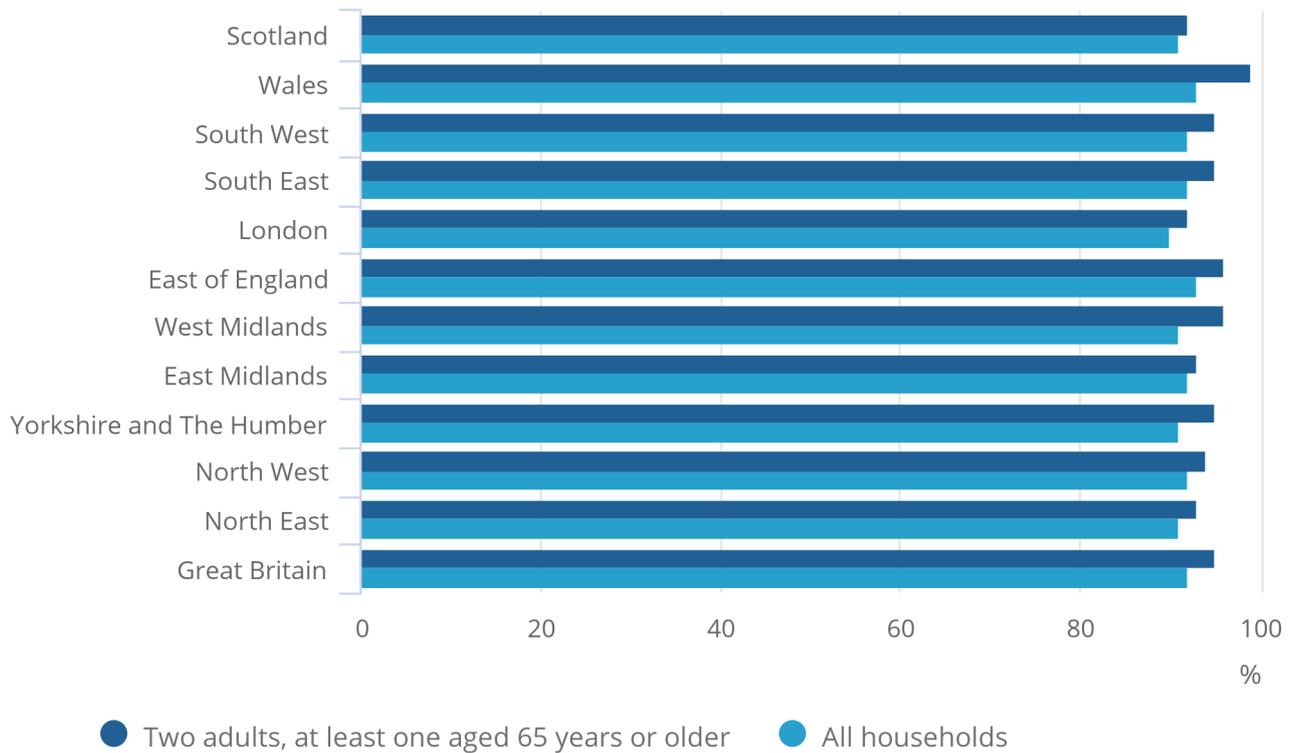
The highest level of avoidance in early 2021 among all households in the regions and countries, was reported by households where at least one adult was over 65 years in Wales (99%, Figure 1) .

Figure 1: Adults in households where at least one person was over 65 years were more likely to avoid physical contact than any other group during the early 2021 lockdown

Great Britain, countries and regions, 7 January to 28 March 2021

Figure 1: Adults in households where at least one person was over 65 years were more likely to avoid physical contact than any other group during the early 2021 lockdown

Great Britain, countries and regions, 7 January to 28 March 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

Notes:

1. Question: “Examples of direct physical contact may include shaking or holding hands, hugging and making contact when passing objects. In the past seven days, have you avoided physical contact with others when outside your home?” Base: adults who left their home in the past seven days.
2. Confidence intervals are provided in the datasets associated with this bulletin. As a general rule, if the confidence interval around one estimate overlaps with the interval around another, we cannot say with certainty that there is more than a chance difference between the two estimates.

Leaving home

Most adults across all household types in Great Britain reported they had left their home in the past seven days with the lowest levels seen in spring 2020 (88%), compared with summer 2020 (92%) and during the early-2021 lockdown (92%). The largest increase from spring 2020 to summer was seen in the South West (87% to 94%).

A high proportion of adults in households where everyone was under 65 years consistently reported that they had left home since spring 2020. The highest proportions in each period were seen in single adults under 65 years in Wales (97%) in spring 2020, two adults under 65 years in the North East in summer 2020 (99%) and two adults under 65 years in Wales (97%) during the early 2021 lockdown. The lowest proportions in each period was seen in single adults over 65 years in the East of England in spring 2020 (64%), in the North West in summer 2020 (78%), and in West Midlands (83%) during the early 2021 lockdown.

Adults aged over 65 years have increasingly reported leaving their homes since spring 2020. The proportion of single adults aged over 65 years who reported that they left their homes increased by 14 percentage points across Great Britain, with the highest increase seen in the North East, East Midlands, East of England and Wales (20 percentage point increase).

4 . Leaving home for work and working from home

Leaving home for work

Adults aged under 65 years (both single and in two person households) and households with children were most likely to report leaving home for work (of those who reported they left home for any reason) across all periods in Great Britain.

The biggest increase in adults leaving home for work was seen between spring 2020 and summer 2020, in the West Midlands (13 percentage point increase). The smallest increase was seen in the North West (4 percentage points). Adults from two person households and households with children in the West Midlands reported the biggest increase in people who reported leaving home for work in summer 2020 compared to spring 2020 (27% to 53% and 19% to 44%).

Adults aged under 65 years in London were consistently less likely to report leaving home for work than other regions and countries. Despite a general increase during summer 2020, adults reporting they left home for work remained the lowest in London out of all the regions.

The proportion of working age adults and adults with children in London fell below the national average in all periods.

Working from home

Almost half of working adults from two person households, single adult households under 65 years and households with children reported working from home (47%, 49% and 47%) in early 2021 lockdown. Adults belonging to single person households in London (71%) were most likely to report working from home, whereas single adults in the North East were least likely to report working from home (37%).

Figure 2: Working from home has increasingly become a reality for working adults with children in Scotland and the North East

Great Britain, countries and regions, spring 2020 and early 2021 lockdown

Source: Office for National Statistics – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

Notes:

1. Estimates for adults under 65 years combine responses from single adult and two person households where people are aged under 65 years.
2. Question: "In the past seven days, have you worked from home because of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?" Base population: those who said they were working.
3. For this survey, a person is said to be working if last week: they had a paid job, either as an employee or self-employed; or they did any casual work for payment; or they did any unpaid or voluntary work.
4. Confidence intervals are provided in the datasets associated with this bulletin. As a general rule, if the confidence interval around one estimate overlaps with the interval around another, we cannot say with certainty that there is more than a chance difference between the two estimates

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

Adults who reported they were able to work from home was similar in both the early 2021 lockdown and spring 2020. However, in subnational areas there were differences between the periods, particularly adults with children in Scotland, (where there was a 15 percentage point increase). For adults under 65 years, the biggest increase was by 10 percentage points, in the West Midlands.

5 . Concern about the effect of the pandemic on life

Across all periods, adults belonging to households with children, and adults in two person households where one person was aged over 65 years were the groups who most frequently reported that they were worried or very worried about the effect of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on their lives. The proportion of adults in these household types who reported this was above the national average in each period. For instance, in spring 2020, 79% of adults belonging to these types of households reported they were worried compared with 76% of all households.

However, during the early 2021 lockdown, adults under 65 years reverted to worry levels similar to the spring 2020 period. The rise in percentage of adults under 65 years reporting that they were worried was driven by increases in the West Midlands, which saw a 12 percentage point increase of single adults under 65 years reporting that they were worried about the effect of the pandemic on their lives.

Almost 8 in 10 (79%) of adults in households with children reported being worried about the effect of the pandemic on their lives in spring 2020, compared with 71% in summer 2020 and 74% in early 2021. In spring 2020 and summer 2020, households with children in London were most worried (84% and 78%). During the early 2021 lockdown, Wales had the highest proportion of households with children reporting they were either worried or very worried about the impact of the pandemic on their lives (79%).

Figure 3: Across all periods, adults belonging to households with children reported being worried or very worried about the impact of the pandemic on their lives, particularly in spring 2020

Great Britain, countries and regions, spring 2020, summer 2020 and early 2021 lockdown

Figure 3: Across all periods, adults belonging to households with children reported being worried or very worried about the impact of the pandemic on their lives, particularly in spring 2020

Great Britain, countries and regions, spring 2020, summer 2020 and early 2021 lockdown



Source: Office for National Statistics – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

Notes:

1. Question: "How worried or unworried are you about the effect that coronavirus (COVID-19) is having on your life right now?" Base population: all adults.
2. Confidence intervals are provided in the datasets associated with this bulletin. As a general rule, if the confidence interval around one estimate overlaps with the interval around another, we cannot say with certainty that there is more than a chance difference between the two estimates.

6 . Ability to afford an unexpected expense

Generally, the proportion of all adults reporting they could afford an unexpected but necessary expense of £850 has remained stable in all periods at a national level. However, households with children and single adults under 65 years were consistently worse off when considering this measure across the different regions and countries.

In spring 2020, 58% of all adults said they would be able to afford an unexpected but necessary expense, compared with 45% of single adults and 46% of households with children.

The group most affected in this period were single adults in the North West (34%) and households with children in the North East (28%). Perceptions of this have improved for households with children in the North East, this group were more likely to report being able to afford an unexpected expense in summer 2020 (48%) and early 2021 (45%). Households with children in the North West were the only group whose assessment of their current financial situation got worse, 51% reported they were able to afford an unexpected expense in spring 2020, compared with 44% in early 2021.

Ability to save in the next 12 months

Adults in two person households under 65 years consistently reported being able to save money in the next 12 months, above the national average in all periods, and households with children were least likely to report being able to save. The greatest difference was in early 2021 lockdown, in London, where 63% of adults under 65 years reported they could save compared with 38% of households with children.

Figure 4: In early 2021, more adults reported being able to save money than in previous periods, particularly in adults aged under 65 years in London

Great Britain, countries, and regions, early 2021 lockdown

Notes:

1. Question: "In view of the general economic situation, do you think you will be able to save any money in the next twelve months?" Base population: all adults.
2. Confidence intervals are provided in the datasets associated with this bulletin. As a general rule, if the confidence interval around one estimate overlaps with the interval around another, we cannot say with certainty that there is more than a chance difference between the two estimates.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

Further insight on households and their financial wellbeing is detailed in our latest [Personal and economic wellbeing release](#).

7 . Perceptions of the future

During the spring 2020, 62% of all adults thought life would return to normal in less than a year. Of the household types considered, adults in households with children (64%) and households with three or more adults of all ages (63%) were most likely to report this. Adults over 65 years were the least optimistic, 57% thought life would return to normal in less than a year.

By summer 2020, it had reduced to half (50%) of adults who thought life would return to normal in less than a year. Again, older households were least optimistic. The largest decreases were seen for households of single adults aged 16 years to 64 years which fell by 29 percentage points from around 70% to a little over 40% in Yorkshire and The Humber, East Midlands, and West Midlands. Whereas Great Britain as a whole became slightly more optimistic at 54% by early 2021, it was single adults aged 16 years to 64 years who were now least likely to think life would return to normal in less than a year.

When considering regions, the largest reduction in optimism was seen in households of single adults aged 16 years to 64 years in Yorkshire and The Humber which experienced a 27 percentage point decrease in likelihood of thinking life would return to normal in early 2021 compared to spring 2020. In the latest data period, there is little variation between regions and countries in the proportion of people who thought life would return to normal.

8 . Social impacts on Great Britain data

[Coronavirus and the social impacts on households in subnational areas in Great Britain](#)

Dataset | Released 27 April 2021

Indicators from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Opinions and Lifestyle Survey to understand the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on different households in subnational areas in Great Britain, 2020 and 2021.

[Coronavirus and the social impacts on city regions in Great Britain](#)

Dataset | Released 27 April 2021

Indicators from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Opinions and Lifestyle Survey to understand the impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on city regions in Great Britain, 2020 and 2021.

9 . Glossary

Early 2021 lockdown

On 5 January 2021, the UK government announced a further national lockdown for [England](#). Similar rules applied for [Scotland](#) and [Wales](#), particularly the message to “stay at home” meaning that adults in Great Britain were under a national lockdown at the start of the year in 2021.

On 22 February 2021, the UK government published a four-step [roadmap](#) for easing lockdown restrictions in England. On 23 February, the Scottish government published an update to the [strategic framework](#) for easing lockdown restrictions in Scotland.

In England, as per the first step of easing outlined in the roadmap, it was confirmed from 29 March people could meet outdoors in a group of six ([among other changes to restrictions](#)). In Wales, from 13 March, “stay at home” restrictions were replaced with [stay local restrictions](#). In Scotland, “stay local” replaced “stay at home” from 2 April.

Further easing of lockdown restrictions were applied from April 12 in [England](#), [Wales](#) and [Scotland](#). The data presented in this release were collected prior to this.

Households

The data are representative of individuals belonging to a particular household only, and not the entire household.

10 . Measuring the data

The Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) is a monthly omnibus survey. In response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we adapted the OPN to become a weekly survey used to collect data on the impact of the coronavirus on day-to-day life in Great Britain.

To enable more detailed analysis as in this bulletin, waves of the weekly OPN data have been pooled together and reweighted to create larger datasets. By pooling data, we improve the sample size available to create smaller breakdowns of individual questions at the expense of having to report on a wider time period.

In the first pooled datasets used for this bulletin, 23,299 individuals were sampled, with a response rate of 60.3% (or 14,030 individuals) for survey responses collected between 20 March 2020 to 31 May 2020. For data covering the 4 June 2020 to 2 August 2020, 23,838 individuals were sampled, with a response rate of 65.7% (or 15,660 individuals) for the survey. For data covering 7 January 2021 to 28 March 2021, 72,439 individuals were sampled, with a response rate of 72.2% (or 52,020 individuals).

The survey results are weighted to be a nationally representative sample for Great Britain, and data are collected using an online self-completion questionnaire. Individuals who did not want to or were unable to complete the survey online had the opportunity to take part over the phone. Where differences between groups are presented in this bulletin, associated [confidence intervals](#), which are included in the [associated datasets](#), indicate their significance.

Sampling

A sample of households was randomly selected from those that had previously completed the Labour Force Survey (LFS) or the Labour Market Survey (LMS). From each household, one adult was selected at random but with unequal probability. Younger people were given higher selection probability than other people because of under-representation in the sample available for the survey. The survey also includes a boosted sample for England, to allow more detailed analysis at a regional level, which are available in the datasets.

Weighting

Survey weights were applied to the pooled datasets to make estimates representative of the population.

Weights were first adjusted for non-response and attrition. Subsequently, the weights were calibrated to satisfy population distributions considering the following factors: sex by age, region, tenure, highest qualification and employment status. For age, sex and region, population totals based on projections of mid-year population estimates for November 2020 were used. The resulting weighted sample is therefore representative of the Great Britain adult population by a number of socio-demographic factors and geography.

11 . Strengths and limitations

The main strengths of the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) include:

- it allows for timely production of data and statistics that can respond quickly to changing needs
- it meets data needs: the questionnaire is developed with customer consultation, and design expertise is applied in the development stages
- robust methods are adopted for the survey's sampling and weighting strategies to limit the impact of bias
- quality assurance procedures are undertaken throughout the analysis stages to minimise the risk of error

The main limitations of the OPN include:

- analysis of estimates in Wales and Scotland are based on low sample sizes, and therefore caution should be used with these estimates
- comparisons between periods and groups must be done with caution as estimates are provided from a sample survey; as such, [confidence intervals](#) are included in the datasets to present the sampling variability, which should be taken into account when assessing differences between periods, as true differences may not exist

12 . Related links

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) latest data and analysis](#)

Web page | Updated as data become available

Latest data and analysis on the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in the UK and its effects on the economy and society.

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) roundup](#)

Blog | Updated as data become available

Catch up on the latest data and analysis related to the coronavirus pandemic and its impact on our economy and society.

[Coronavirus and the social impacts on NUTS2 areas in Great Britain](#)

Dataset | Released 27 November 2020

Indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) on the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) on people, households and communities, by NUTS2 area.

[Coronavirus and the social impacts on the countries and regions of Britain: April 2020](#)

Bulletin | Released 26 May 2020

Indicators from the OPN to understand the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on people, households and communities in the countries and regions of Great Britain. This release uses four waves of survey results covering April 2020 to present results for Wales, Scotland and the nine English regions.

[Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain](#)

Dataset | Released 23 April 2021

Indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey covering the period 14 April to 18 April 2021 to understand the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on people, households and communities in Great Britain.