

When life revolves around the home: Work and sociability during the lockdown

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SciencesPo
Observatoire sociologique du changement
Centre de données socio-politiques



When life revolves around the home

Work and sociability during the lockdown

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Emanuele Ferragina, Emily Helmeid, Stefan Pauly,
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How disruptive is Covid-19 to everyday life? How is the French population experiencing the lockdown? Is it magnifying inequalities and affecting social cohesion? The CoCo project sheds lights on these pressing questions by comparing living conditions in France before, during, and after the lockdown. This is the third of a series of research briefs that we will publish in the forthcoming weeks. In this brief, we explore how French society has coped with the first 6 weeks of the lockdown, with the transformation of working conditions and social life. We also continue to monitor self-reported health and well-being, as in the two previous briefs.

Coping with Covid-19

Social distancing, cohesion and inequality in 2020 France

n° 3

Summary

During the lockdown:

- About a third of workers kept working at their workplaces, another third shifted to remote work while the rest stopped working altogether, becoming unemployed or taking leave.
- Women with at least one young child at home were more likely to stop working.
- Remote-work is concentrated in the middle to upper segments of the income distribution, while working outside the home remains the norm for the bottom-half of earners.
- Remote workers' working conditions are better in comparison to workplace-workers, whether measured by tension with colleagues or by short-term implications for wages. Remote-workers are the most interested in continuing to work remotely after the lockdown.
- The division of domestic work tends to be more egalitarian in households where the woman is working remotely.
- Unprecedented levels of online social contact have compensated for a steep drop in sociability. Continued in-person contact was most prevalent with relatives, while people who developed new relationships during confinement did so mostly with their neighbours.
- While contracting the virus initially had more to do with geography, it now has more to do with employment conditions. People who kept going to the workplace were more likely to catch it.
- While happiness levels dropped at the beginning of the lockdown, they have regained and even surpassed pre-lockdown levels for most people, with the exception of those who were not very sociable before the lockdown.

Working through the lockdown: *How* and *where* one works depends on *what* one does

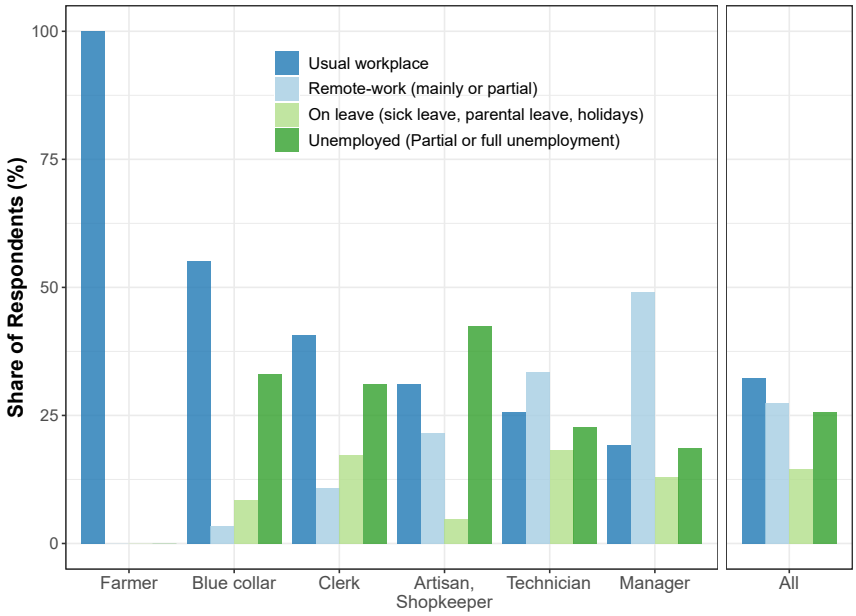
The lockdown has had a dramatic effect on employment. By early May, about a third of workers had continued to work at their workplace, another third had shifted to remot work while the others had stopped working altogether, becoming unemployed (25%) or taking leave (14%). We track changes in work situations over the course of the lockdown for those who were employed on 15 March and for whom we have observations in both the first (1-8 April) and third (29 April-6 May) waves of the survey (N=483). For the most part, the situation remained the same for those who declared going to work or working remotely (true for 81% and 73% respectively). The main change concerns those who started the lockdown period on leave or unemployed and who had gone back to work by the end (true for 31% and 19% respectively).

Traditional gender roles kick in under the emergency conditions of the lockdown. Compared to men, women are slightly less likely to be working at home (25% vs. 33%) and more likely to become unemployed (28% vs. 22%). But among parents whose youngest child is under six years old, only 13% of women work outside the home, compared to 36% of men. The proportion of women with young children who are unemployed or on leave is nearly twice that of men (69% vs. 42%).

The contrast between occupations is even more striking (Figure 1). Farmers, blue-collar workers and clerks who were able to keep working had to do so at their usual workplaces. By contrast, managers, professionals and mid-level employees were substantially more likely to be able to work from home. For many occupations, work almost came to a complete stop, which mainly meant being on leave for higher status occupations and on partial unemployment for lower status occupations.

Where people work during the lockdown is related to wage inequalities. Only 15% of the bottom-half of earners were able to work at home compared to 48% of middle to high earners. Hence, among those in the bottom half of the wage distribution, 41% kept going to their workplace during the lockdown, as compared to just 20% among middle to high earners

Figure 1. Change in work situation by occupation for those who were employed before the lockdown



Sources: Coping with Covid-19 – 1st and 3rd wave (CoCo-1-3), – April 1-8 & April 29 - May 6 2020, Annual Survey 2019, ELIPSS/CDSP. N=482. Reading: 100% of farmers were still working at their usual workplace by the beginning of May.

and 27% among earners in the top decile. Moreover, employment conditions during the lockdown accentuate wage inequality: 21% of workplace-workers declared a drop in their wages versus only 2% of remote-workers.

We studied the implications of these changes in work conditions on a wide range of work-related variables. They hint at relatively more favorable working conditions for remote workers. First, despite the fact that professional conflicts seem to be rare during the period, working from the workplace does seem to trigger such tensions. This finding is consistent with workers' preferences for the way in which they would prefer to work in the future: remote workers lag far behind other categories of workers when it comes to their desire to work exclusively at their workplace (22% in comparison to 62% of other workers, 65% of workers on leave and 50% of workers who went on unemployment).

> *"The only negative thing to happen to me during these 50 days of telework: having lost my sleep rhythm. Impossible to fall asleep..."*

When professional and domestic life collides

With the start of the lockdown, home suddenly became the site of both paid and unpaid labor (housework, cooking, childcare, and all other types of domestic work). This overlap is all the more visible in dual-earner households. In the following analyses we focus on households for which the respondent was employed on 15 March and his/her partner was employed in 2019. During the lockdown, 14.3% of these couples become non-working couples (either on leave or on partial unemployment), 13.7% dual-remote-workers and 9.2% dual-workplace-workers. When both partners keep working during the lockdown, a mismatch in their place of work is rare. When there is at least one young child in the household, women are far more likely to not be working during the lockdown, regardless of what her partner is doing[1]. Childcare does seem to be the most decisive factor in shifting the employment situation for women from working to non-working during the lockdown.

We now go one step further and investigate the effect of the lockdown on the division of domestic labor in the household. We focus in particular on men who, overall perform 36% of the domestic tasks measured in our survey. Men contribute the least to ironing and laundry (14% and 17% respectively) and the most to home improvement / gardening (62%) and shopping (47%). While these differences are consistent with what we know from prior research on domestic labor, our data allow us to measure the effect that couples' lockdown employment conditions have on how they divide up these tasks. Men contribute the least (29%) when both partners work in the workplace - a scenario most closely resembling the *status quo.* Conversely, and somehow surprisingly, they contribute the most when the woman is working from home, regardless of her partner's employment situation (reaching as high as 45% when he is not working). The positive effect of a woman working from home on her partner's overall contribution to domestic tasks holds even after controlling for age, education, income and their youngest child's age. But this is especially the case for two particular tasks: shopping and laundry. Even in these households, though, women still bear the brunt of household labor.

Most of our respondents experienced some tension at home during the lockdown (74%), though it tended to be more occasional than frequent. The degree of reported tension increases by 4 points when male

1. We do not know the partner's sex in our data. Based on the respondent's sex we therefore infer his/her spouses' sex assuming that the couple is heterosexual. According to Insee, in 2018, same-sex couples accounted for 0.9% of all couples in France which suggest that, despite its limitations, our inference should not introduce too much bias in the overall findings.

partners are not working (*i.e.* on leave or partially unemployed) versus when they are working at work (on a 0 to 100 scale). By contrast, female partners report 4 points more tension when working at home versus working at work.

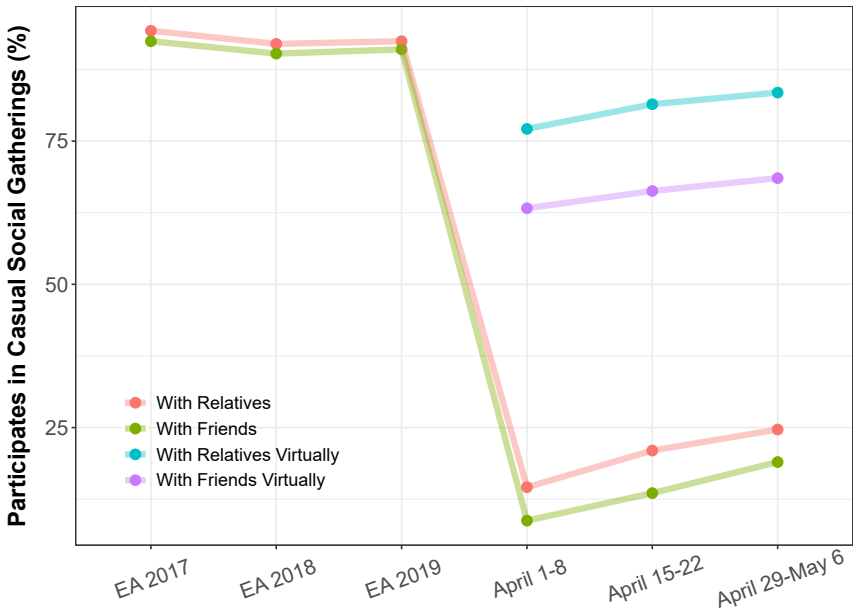
But it is the presence of a young child (pre-elementary school age) that really causes tensions to rise. In these households, they are an average of 8 points higher. Compound this with a scenario in which the woman works remotely while her partner is also at home (whether working or not) and tensions rise even further. In fact, these couples experience 18 to 20 points more tension compared to households with older children or in a scenario where the man works and the women does not. More than supervising homework, cooking, shopping or cleaning, tension in these households stems from an unequal division of labor when it comes to attending to young children's needs. This is less of a problem for couples in which the woman stopped working and more of an issue when she kept working but from home. It is as if men are having difficulty accepting the need to pull more weight when it comes to child rearing.

When some social ties are cut, others are made

The stated goal of the lockdown is to limit the circulation of the virus by drastically reducing physical contact between people. Our results show a sharp drop in casual social gatherings with both friends and relatives, from over 90% to below 20%. Even so, this means that nearly one in five people in France continue to meet up, especially with relatives. Figure 2 illustrates a substitution pattern between in-person gatherings and virtual social relations. Although we do not have the data to make a comparison between pre- and post-lockdown virtual relations, the proportions of people who declare

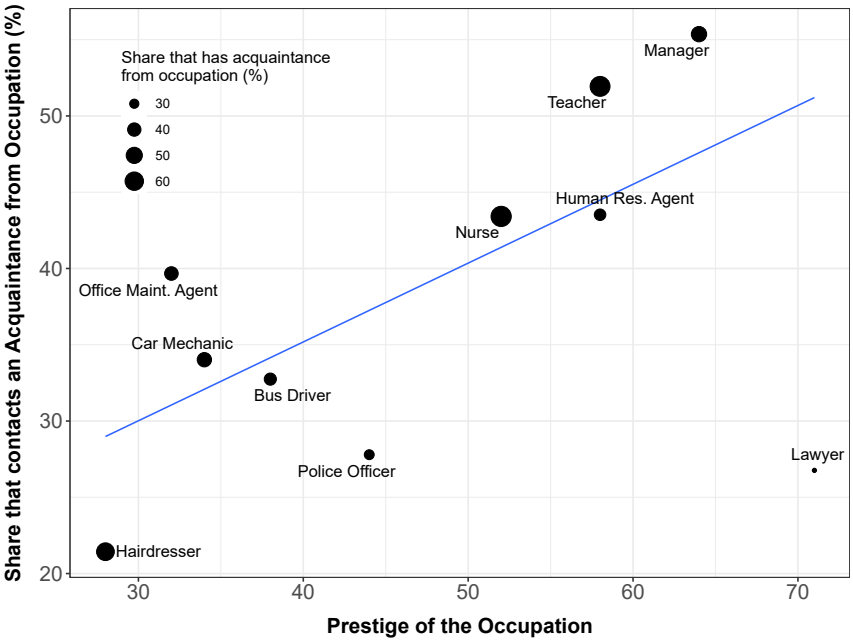
> *"Loneliness, loneliness, and again loneliness, the impression of being in prison for nothing".*

Figure 2. The evolution of social interactions during the lockdown



Sources: Coping with Covid-19 – 1st, 2nd & 3rd wave (CoCo-1-2-3), April 1-8 & 15-22 & April 29 - May 6 2020, Annual Survey 2017, 2018, 2019, ELIPSS/CDSP.
N=847. Reading: "The share of those participating in casual social gatherings with relatives in the Enquête Annuelle (EA) 2017 was 94%".
Note that the questions on physical meetings with relatives and friends in the EA and the CoCo surveys are not exactly the same. In particular, in the EA, respondents are asked whether they have met respondents several times a year and in the CoCo surveys at least once in the past two weeks. Results do not change when we change the EA variable to only account for more frequent meetings (e.g. once a month). Importantly, the share of respondents meeting relatives is the same as the share meeting friends.

Figure 3. The structure of social capital during the lockdown



Sources: Coping with Covid-19 – 3rd wave (CoCo-3), April 29 - May 6 2020, ELIPSS/CDSP.
N=1019. Reading: "Of the 57% who have an acquaintance who is a hairdresser, 21% were in contact with them during the lockdown. This occupation has a prestige score of 28". The prestige score is based on Chambaz/Maurin/Torelli (1998). The blue line comes from a linear regression model using as weights the total share that has an acquaintance in the given occupation (the size of the dots).

connecting virtually with relatives and friends do seem strikingly close to pre-lockdown statistics for in-person gatherings. In general, social life seems to be slowly recovering from the low point it hit during the first weeks of the lockdown. The share of those reporting in-person contact with relatives increased from 15% two weeks into the lockdown to 25% at six weeks (the timing of the most recent survey). Interestingly enough, this slow but steady increase of in-person relations has not gone hand in hand with a decrease in virtual relations.

During the lockdown, social contacts have been more frequent with people in high-prestige occupations[2] (Figure 3). One explanation is that the lockdown drastically limited certain spheres of interaction that were conducive to interactions with medium and low prestige occupations, rendering some of them simply impossible (*e.g.* hairdresser) and others less pressing (*e.g.* car mechanic). Conversely, the lockdown made it practically a necessity to be in contact with one's HR representative or with teachers, for respondents with children. Lockdown constraints, rather than prestige per se, generally restrict social life to the basic necessities -- work, health (as illustrated by the relatively high proportion of people in contact with a nurse) and education. Nonetheless, we still find a social gradient pattern in the way ego's social network is structured during the lockdown: managers, high-earner respondents and respondents who have been working from home are significantly more likely to have high-prestige contacts. This finding hints at a potential segregative effect of the lockdown on social relations, as they tend to be more concentrated on relatives and also more frequent within high earner and high prestige professions.

For 16% of respondents, the confinement period brought about new social ties, both among those who had frequent social relations (encounters, visits, joint outings) before the lockdown and those who did not. Of all newly minted relationships, 69%

2. We draw on classic sociological approaches for measuring social capital and ask our respondents whether or not they personally 'know' people who occupy certain occupations. We also ask them if they have been in contact with any of these people since confinement began. We use the Chambaz-Maureen-Torelli Occupation Prestige Score in Figure 3.

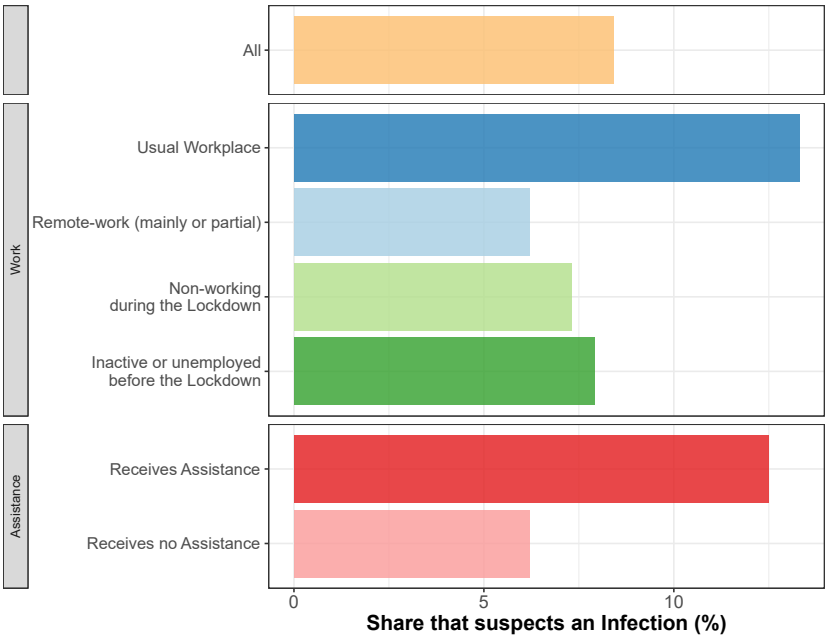
are among neighbors and 15% online. This suggests that, even though online sociability is a substitute for physical social relations, there is also a very local - and very real - dimension to people's sociability during confinement. The ways in which staying at home has fostered relationships with neighbors may have long lasting implications for social cohesion within neighborhoods.

In the search for new acquaintances, the extent to which one leans toward neighbors versus online encounters depends on pre-lockdown sociability. People who were highly sociable before the lockdown were much more likely to connect with their neighbors (78% vs. 42% for those with rare social interactions), whereas people who were less sociable were much more likely to have built new online relationships (45% vs. only 5% for those with frequent social interactions). This variation in sociability during the lockdown holds across gender, age, education, income and regional differences. Rather than mere substitution, this hints at a reproduction of prior sociability channels during the lockdown and suggests that the stay-at-home experience has amplified the separation of sociability spheres.

Home safe home: when the workplace becomes hazardous

Among our panelists, 8.4% say that they either had a confirmed case of the virus or strongly suspect that they have been sick with it -- an increase from the first wave conducted two weeks into the lockdown (6%). While in early April, the spread of the virus was mostly driven by regional variations, our data from early May begin to demonstrate a correlation between Covid-19 infection rates and work situations. Of those working outside their home, 13.3% say that they have been infected versus only 6.2% of remote workers. If we restrict our sample to respondents who had not (yet) contracted the virus in the first wave of the survey, we find that those who had to continue going to their workplace in the early phases of the lockdown had a higher probability of getting sick. After controlling for age, gender, education, income, occupation and regions, we find that workers outside the home are three times more likely to declare becoming infected with Covid-19 at some point before the beginning of May. This result holds even after looking more closely at the specific Covid-19 symptoms they declare having experienced. The effect of continuing to go to the workplace is

Figure 4. Suspicion of infection by work situation and need for assistance



Sources: Coping with Covid-19 – 1st & 3rd wave (CoCo-1-3), April 29 – May 6 2020, ELIPSS/CDSP. N=924. Reading: "13% of respondents working at their usual workplace suspect a Covid-19 infection".

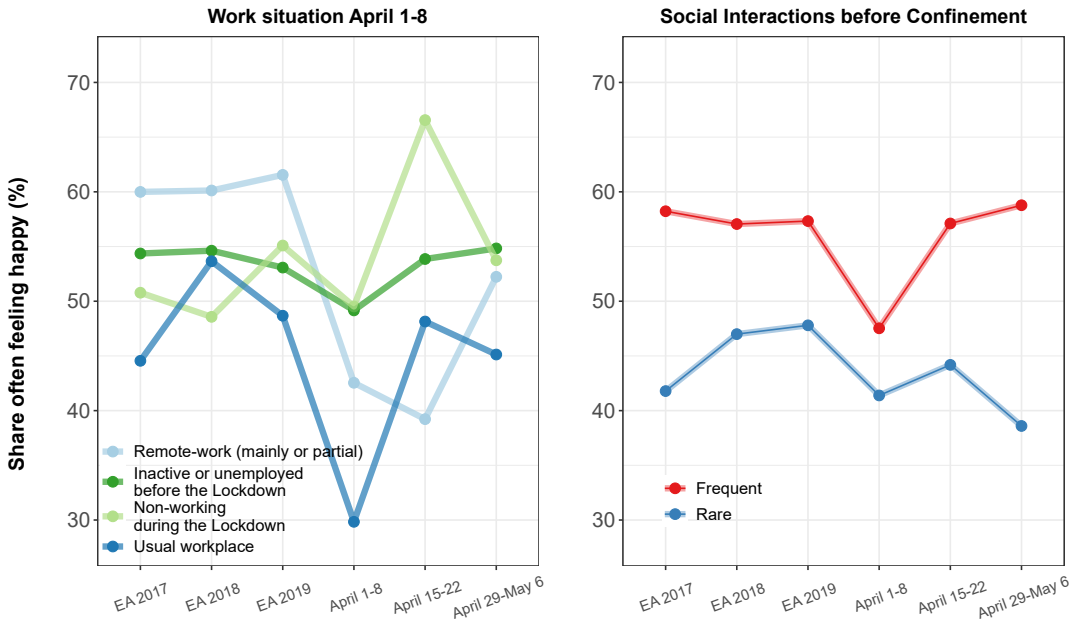
the most pronounced for clerks and managers. This is probably because in-person contacts are more frequent in these two occupations, either with the general public in the case of clerks (like cashiers or caregivers) or with their team (*e.g.* in meetings) in the case of managers. This finding is consistent with the central position managers hold in our respondents' social networks as illustrated in Figure 3 above.

In addition to employment conditions, the frequency of social interactions during the lockdown also plays a role in the risk of infection. We find that people who had frequent social interactions before the lockdown are less likely to declare having been infected than those with infrequent social interactions. Nearly three out of ten respondents say that they got a helping hand from others at some point during the lockdown (*e.g.* to do their shopping, take care of their kids, etc.). The rate of infection among these people is nearly twice as high as the rate for people who did not receive assistance (12.5% vs. 6.2% respectively). Nevertheless, we can't rule out reverse causality here as people might also be more in need of help when they are sick. Interestingly enough, dependence on others is shown to be higher for women and the elderly, and it tends to decrease with income.

Whether personal or professional, social interactions matter

As in previous policy briefs, we can exploit the longitudinal nature of our survey to explore changes in different measures of subjective well-being in the population. Respondents are still less nervous (around 24% in the latest survey) and more relaxed (11%) than prior to the lockdown. However, we find that reported happiness and loneliness are back to pre-Covid levels. Most importantly, the significant drop in happiness that we found in the first policy brief [https://zenodo.org/record/3757870] seems to have been only temporary in nature.

Figure 5. The effect of employment situations and social interactions on happiness



Sources: Coping with Covid-19 – 1st, 2nd & 3rd wave (CoCo-1-2-3), April 1-8 & 15-22 & April 29 - May 6 2020, Annual Survey 2017, 2018, 2019, ELIPSS/CDSP.
N=847. Reading: "The share of those reporting feeling happy either often or all the time among those with rare social interactions was 41% in the Enquête annuelle from 2017".
The frequency of social interactions before the lockdown is defined based on a variable from CoCo-3 that asks respondents to assess whether their social interactions prior to confinement with people other than those living with them were "Very frequent", "Rather frequent", "Rather rare", "Very rare". We group the two former and the two latter to form the two categories used in the figure.

We find large variations in reported happiness depending on how our respondents' employment situations changed (or did not change) as a result of the lockdown (Figure 5). Among panelists who were employed just before the lockdown, the generalized drop in happiness corresponds to the start of the lockdown period. It is most dramatic, however, for those who continued to work, whether at their workplaces or from home (the share reporting that they 'often feel happy' declined from 49% to 30% among the former and from 62% to 43% among the latter). Nonetheless, it is remote workers who have had the most difficulty returning to their pre-lockdown level of happiness. The levels of happiness for those who went on leave or became unemployed seem to have been least affected by the first two weeks of lockdown. The initial drop in happiness for workers who became non-working (on leave or partially unemployed) is much less sizable than that for remote and workplace-workers.

The right panel in Figure 5 also shows trends in happiness according to respondents' pre-lockdown sociability levels. Here again, the drop in happiness clearly corresponds to the beginning of lockdown and is most concentrated on the highly sociable. Although less sociable individuals are also generally less likely to say they are happy (43% vs. 56% over the entire sample period), they are also, initially, less affected by the lockdown. Finally, highly sociable respondents also seem to recover their previous levels of happiness faster. They are back to pre-lockdown levels of happiness by the second wave of the survey, while less sociable respondents end up declining even further.

> *"Barbecue with my neighbors through the wall separating the two gardens. Nice time, we had a good laugh".*

Finally, we find in-person gatherings with relatives to be correlated with increased happiness among survey participants, both before and after the start of the lockdown. Physically meeting friends correlates with reduced loneliness, but to a lesser extent during the lockdown[3]. The changed nature of in-person gatherings as a result of the lockdown as well as the perception of increased risk of becoming infected might have rendered get-togethers with friends less emotionally satisfying. However, meeting friends virtually during the lockdown appears to partially compensate for this, as it is positively correlated with reduced loneliness.

3. Here we performed a panel regression with individual fixed effects to estimate the impact of in-person social interactions during the lockdown (either with relatives or with friends) on feelings of loneliness and happiness.

Methodology

Data for this Brief come from the first three waves of the CoCo survey, which is part of the project "Coping with Covid-19: Social Distancing, Cohesion and Inequality in 2020 France", funded by the French Agence nationale de la recherche (Flash Covid-19 call).
For details on the project:
https://www.sciencespo.fr/osc/fr/content/faire-face-au-covid-19.html

The CoCo survey is part of ELIPSS, a probability-based panel launched in 2012 thanks to ANR support (Grant for infrastructures ANR-10-EQPX-19-01). ELIPSS is maintained by CDSP, the Center for Socio-Political Data of Sciences Po. ELIPSS currently relies on a sample of 1400 French residents. The sample has been drawn from census data collected through face-to-face interviews at the initial stage with an acceptance rate superior to 25 per cent. Panelists participate in about 10 surveys a year, with a response rate close to 85 per cent on average. Data from ELIPSS is calibrated through a combination of various weighting strategies. Final weights, as used in this brief, have been computed to take into account design effects from the initial stage, bias due to acceptance rate in the enrollment phase, and post-stratification taking into account sex, age, education and region. Detailed information regarding this procedure is available here:
http://quanti.dime-shs.sciences-po.fr/media/ckeditor/uploads/2018/03/21/ponderationselipss_documentation.pdf.

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ELIPSS team [authors] : Annual survey - 5th, 6st, 7th wave (2017, 2018, 2019) [computer file], Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques (FNSP) [producer], Center for socio-political data (CDSP) [distributor], Version 1.

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