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“What Worries the World?”: Concern about COVID-19 is at its highest level since May 2020

January’s findings show COVID-19 is now the top concern in 17 of the 27 nations surveyed. This is the highest country count since May 2020, when 18 nations cited the pandemic as their single greatest worry

London, 21/01/2021 - On average, 50% around the world currently say COVID-19 is the top issue currently facing their country this month.

This is the highest level recorded since May 2020, when 55% considered the virus one of the most worrying issues facing their country today. Despite the upsurge of the virus in many parts of the world, these present levels of worry are still a little way below the peak of 63% which we recorded when coronavirus was first introduced to the list of topics in April 2020. That survey saw COVID-19 stand out as the single most important concern in 25 out of 28 countries.

What Worries the World is a monthly online survey of adults aged under 75 in 27 countries comprising Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, France, Britain, Germany, Hungary, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, Poland, Peru, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the United States.

The top worries globally are currently (in the following order): COVID-19, Unemployment, Poverty/Social inequality, Financial/Political Corruption and now Healthcare, which joins the top five worries this month:

- 1) COVID-19 (50%):** Included for the first time in April, COVID-19 is still the highest scoring global issue this month. Japan and Malaysia (**where it is mentioned by 70%**), South Korea (**67%**), Canada and Great Britain (**66%**) are currently the nations most worried about this issue. The pandemic is the *single* greatest concern for **17 of the 27 surveyed nations**. The ten countries which do not mention coronavirus as their number one issue are: Argentina (Inflation) Chile (Crime and violence), Hungary (Healthcare), Israel (Unemployment), Italy (Unemployment), Poland (Healthcare), Russia (Poverty/social inequality), South Africa (Financial/political corruption and Unemployment), Sweden (Crime and violence) and Turkey (Unemployment).
- 2) Unemployment (37%):** The highest levels of worry are seen in Italy and South Africa (**62%**) followed by Spain (**57%**) and South Korea (**53%**).
- 3) Poverty/social inequality (29%):** The figure recorded for this issue remains stable with previous months; once again Russia (**scoring 57%**) has the highest levels of concern about this issue, followed by Chile (**41%**) and Turkey (**40%**).





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- 4) **Financial/political corruption (27%)**: The proportion citing this issue also remains the same as the previous two months. Hungary and South Africa (**56%**) are the nations most worried, ahead of Malaysia and Russia (**48%**).
- 5) **Healthcare (24%)**: A small increase (1 point) in global concern about healthcare puts this issue in 5th place, overtaking Crime & violence. Hungary (**56%**) is the nation most concerned, ahead of Poland (**55%**).

The study finds that most people across the 27 countries surveyed say that their country is on the wrong track.

Looking at how many say their nation is on the wrong track (**62% on average**), we find that Peru (**83%**), South Africa (**78%**), Chile (**77%**) are most worried about their country's direction of travel.

Globally, 38% think their country is heading in the right direction while 62% say things are on the wrong track. In the main, people are less assured about the future than a few months ago. The recent peak was in May 2020 when we recorded 45% saying their nation was heading in the right track.

Looking at month-on-month differences, the biggest fall recorded when it comes to positive direction of travel is in Peru, where there has been a 11-point drop from last month to 17% today, making the nation the least optimistic of all surveyed. In contrast, Belgium (where 40% say things are headed in the right direction) has seen a 10-point increase from last month.

The US (where 25% say things are heading in the right direction) is now one of the five least optimistic nations this month. By contrast, it was among the five most positive nations at the start of 2020, with a score of 44%.

Technical Note

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Full results available from <https://www.ipsos.com/en>.

The survey was conducted in **27 countries** around the world via the Ipsos Online Panel system. The 27 countries included are Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, France, Great Britain, Germany, Hungary, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the United States of America.

19,504 interviews were conducted between **December 18th, 2020 and January 8th, 2021** among adults aged 18-74 in the US, South Africa, Turkey, Israel and Canada and age 16-74 in all other countries. Data are weighted to match the profile of the population.

In 16 of the 27 countries surveyed internet penetration is sufficiently high to think of the samples as representative of the wider population within the age ranges covered: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Japan, Poland, South Korea, Spain, Sweden,





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Great Britain and United States. The remaining 11 countries surveyed: Brazil, Chile, India, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, Russia, Peru, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Turkey have lower levels of internet penetration and so these samples should instead be considered to represent a more affluent, connected population. These are still a vital Social group to understand in these countries, representing an important and emerging middle class.

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