

HC1.4. SUBJECTIVE MEASURES ON HOUSING

Definitions and methodology

This indicator presents selected subjective measures based on poll survey data. The first set of measures presents reported levels of satisfaction with housing, whereas the second set presents reported measures of housing stress and housing insecurity.

Housing standards can be subjective, and perceptions, as well as expectations, of the quality and affordability of housing and its environment can differ widely across individuals, countries and cultures. Perceptions of adequate housing may also depend on socio-demographic characteristics. For example, high-income households may have different and higher expectations in terms of housing quality than low-income households. Moreover, the perception of housing satisfaction is a dynamic process that can evolve over time (Satya Brink and Kathleen A. Johnston, (1979)). In all, an individual's satisfaction with the area (s)he lives in is a subjective measure and there is no international definition that set out what an affordable house of good quality actually *is* (see Box 3. Conceptualising and measuring housing affordability from Balestra, C. and J. Sultan (OECD, 2013)).

Subjective measures of housing can be an important complement to other measures of housing outcomes (OECD, 2013), and together can help better understand the determinants of housing satisfaction. In OECD countries, housing affordability is a main driver of residential satisfaction (Balestra, C. and J. Sultan (2013)). Neighbourhood characteristics, such as beauty, setting, access to public transport and the feeling of security, also exert a positive and significant effect on residential satisfaction. Overall, residential satisfaction has an important impact on people's overall well-being.

This indicator made use of five different data sources. The first set of measures present cross-national levels of satisfaction with housing and different aspects of neighbourhood quality and safety, based on the Gallup World Poll. The Gallup World Poll is conducted in more than 150 countries around the world based on a common questionnaire. In this survey, satisfaction with housing and its environment is measured in terms of:

- the share of respondents who report that they are satisfied with the availability of good, affordable housing in the city or area where they live;
- the share of respondents who report that there have been times in the past 12 months when they did not have enough money to provide adequate shelter or housing for them and their family;
- the share of respondents who report that they are satisfied with the public transportation systems;
- the share of respondents who report that they feel safe walking alone at night in the city or area where they live;
- the share of respondents who report that they are satisfied with the city or area where they live.

Two additional measures presented in this indicator are based on survey data from the Australian National University, Eurofound and the US Census Bureau. These surveys asked respondents in Australia, the EU and the United States, respectively, i) whether they had been able to pay their rent or mortgage and ii) whether they expected that they would have to leave their accommodation in the next 3 months because they can no longer afford it. With respect to housing affordability, the data refer to

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the share of respondents that responded that it is “rather likely” or “very likely” that they will need to leave their accommodation.

The final measure presented in this indicator is based on estimates from the *OECD Risks That Matter Survey 2020*, which asked over 25 000 adults in 25 OECD countries about perceptions of the social and economic risks they face and assesses how well people feel government reacts to their concerns. With respect to housing affordability, the data refer to the share of respondents either “somewhat concerned or very concerned” by not being able to find/maintain adequate housing in the short-term (over the next year or two). For policies that aim to support households with housing costs, see indicators in the series PH2, PH3 and PH4.

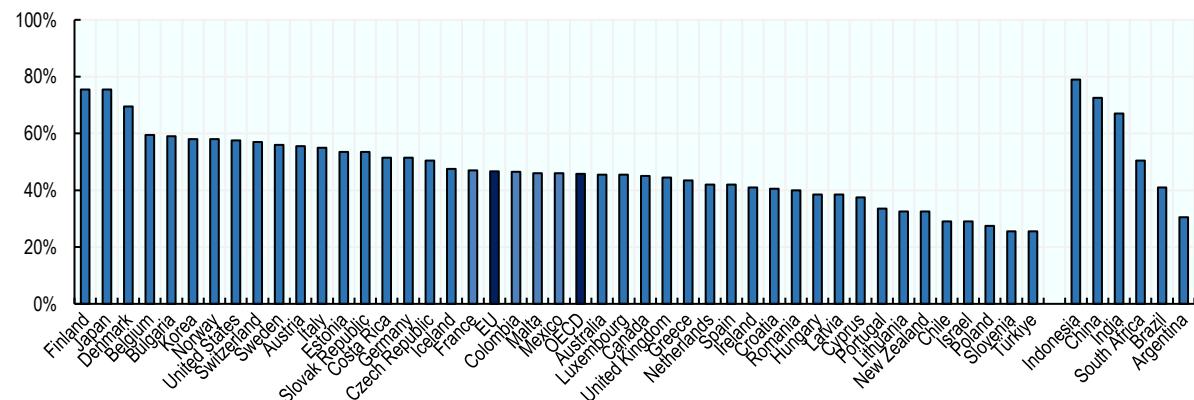
Key findings

Just under half of the OECD population is satisfied with the availability of good, affordable housing on average

On average across the OECD, slightly less than half of the population report that they are satisfied with the availability of good, affordable housing in their city or the area where they live. There is considerable cross-country variation, ranging from more than 70% of the population in Denmark, Finland and Japan, to less than 30% of the population in Chile, Israel, Poland, Slovenia and Türkiye (Figure HC1.4.1).

Figure HC1.4.1. Satisfaction with the availability of quality affordable housing differs widely across countries

Share of people responding that they are satisfied with the availability of good, affordable housing in their city or area where they live, 2020/21



Notes: 1. Data for Luxembourg refer to 2018/19.

2. Data are averaged over 2020 and 2021 to present pandemic-specific indicators and to compensate for the small sample sizes of the source data.

Source: Gallup World Poll (www.gallup.com).

The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

Note by the Republic of Türkiye: The information in this document with reference to “Cyprus” relates to the southern part of the Island. There is no single authority representing both Turkish and Greek Cypriot people on the Island. Türkiye recognises the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Until a lasting and equitable solution is found within the context of the United Nations, Türkiye shall preserve its position concerning the “Cyprus issue”.

Note by all the European Union Member States of the OECD and the European Union: The Republic of Cyprus is recognised by all members of the United Nations with the exception of Türkiye. The information in this document relates to the area under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.

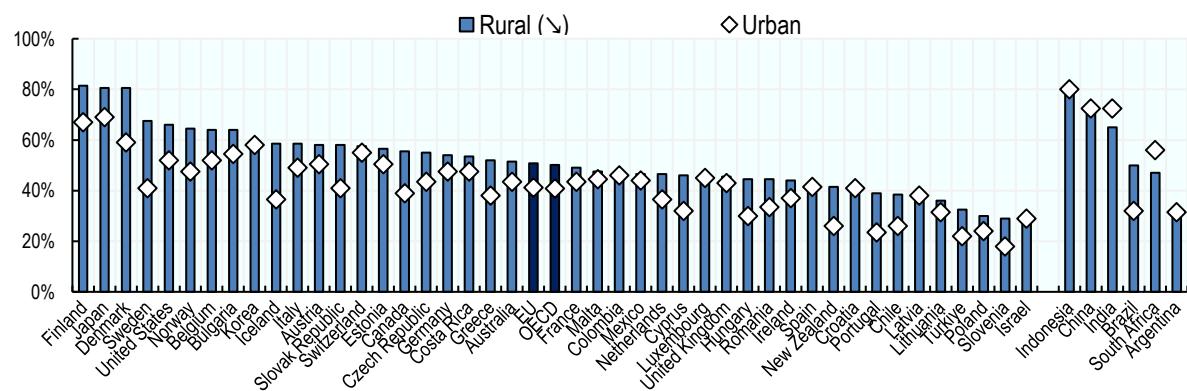
Satisfaction data help provide a more comprehensive picture of housing outcomes across countries than may be gleaned from an initial look at other measures of housing affordability in the [OECD Affordable Housing Database](#). For instance, satisfaction with the availability of good, affordable housing is relatively high in some Nordic countries (such as Denmark and Finland), even though, on average, households in these countries tend to spend a larger share of their income on housing (see [HC1.2. Housing costs over income](#) and [HC1.1 Housing-related expenditure of households](#)). These results suggest that people are willing to spend more on good quality housing (and other public services) if they are offered high-quality accommodation. In addition, satisfaction levels are often higher in countries with more generous social policies (OECD, 2020, Risks that Matter survey). Indeed, Denmark and Finland record a relatively high level of public spending on housing allowances among OECD countries for which data are available ([PH3.1 Public spending on housing allowance](#)).

Urban residents tend to be less satisfied than rural residents with the availability of quality affordable housing

Considerable differences can also be found between urban and rural areas in residents' satisfaction with the availability of good, affordable housing. On average across the OECD, urban residents are about 10 percentage points less satisfied with the availability of quality affordable housing relative to rural residents (Figure HC1.4.2). The largest gaps (20% or more) are observed in Finland, Iceland and Sweden whereas there is no significant difference between the satisfaction of rural and urban residents in Colombia, Croatia, Israel, Korea, Latvia, Luxembourg and Switzerland. House prices tend to grow faster in big cities than in rural areas and a lack of housing supply is particularly a challenge in urban areas (OECD National and Regional House Price Indices).

Figure HC1.4.2. Urban residents are less satisfied with the availability of quality affordable housing compared to rural residents

Share of people responding that they are satisfied with the availability of good, affordable housing in their city or area where they live, urban vs. rural areas, OECD and partner countries, 2020/21



Note: See Figure HC1.4.1.

Source: Gallup World Poll (www.gallup.com).

More than one in ten people in the OECD report housing insecurity over the past 12 months

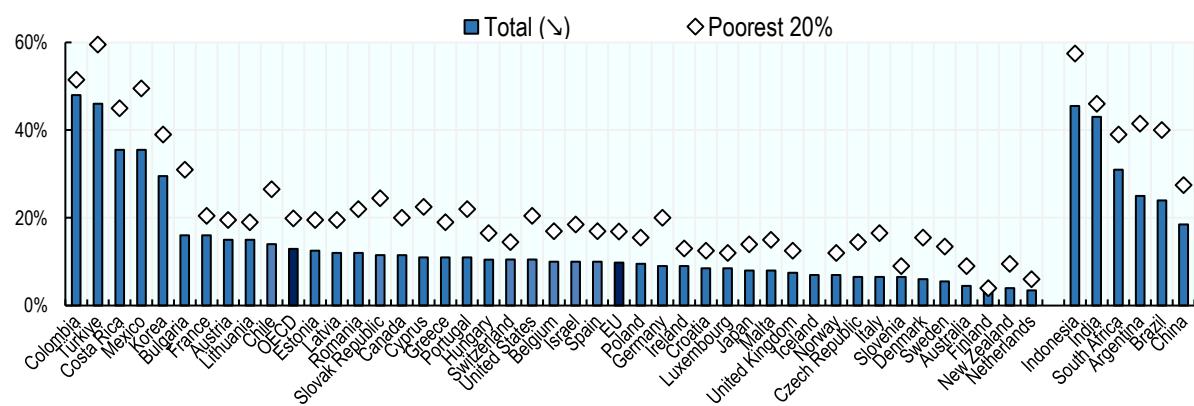
Subjective data can also provide insights into people's experience of housing insecurity. According to the Gallup World Poll, on average across the OECD, about 13 % of the population report that there

have been times in the past 12 months when they did not have enough money to provide adequate shelter or housing for them and their family. The EU-average is slightly lower, at about 10% of the EU population. There are wide cross-country differences: between 46-48% of the population reports such housing stress in Colombia and Türkiye and around 36% of the population in Costa Rica and Mexico, compared to less than 5% of the population in Australia, Finland, the Netherlands and New Zealand (Figure HC1.4.3).

Not surprisingly, low-income households (defined as the poorest 20% of the population) are more likely to report such housing insecurity. More than half of the low-income population in Colombia, Mexico and Türkiye and over 40% in Costa Rica report that there have been times in the past 12 months when they did not have enough money to provide adequate shelter or housing for themselves and their family, along with more than one out of four low-income households in Bulgaria, Chile and the Slovak Republic. In Finland, the Netherlands and Slovenia, however, similar levels of housing insecurity are reported among the poorest 20% and the total population.

Figure HC1.4.3. Low-income households report higher levels of housing insecurity than the rest of the population

Share of people responding that there have been times in the past 12 months when they did not have enough money to provide adequate shelter or housing for them and their family, by income level, 2020/21



Note: See Figure HC1.4.1.

Source: Gallup World Poll (www.gallup.com).

Perceived housing insecurity has increased in many countries over the past decade

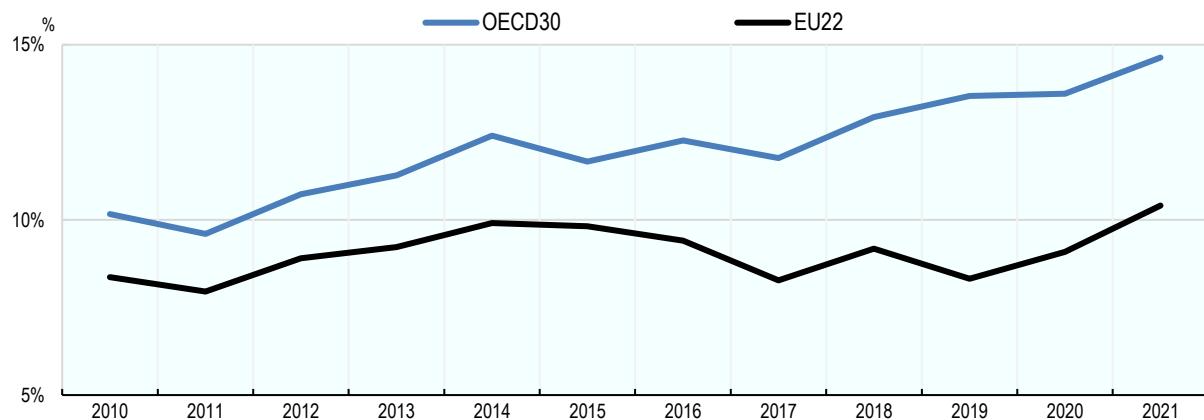
Across the OECD, people have reported increasing difficulty in securing adequate housing for themselves and their family over the last decade (Figure HC1.4.4). On average across OECD countries, the share of the population reporting that there have been times in the past 12 months when they did not have enough money to provide adequate shelter or housing for them and their family increased from around 10% in 2010 to 15% in 2021. These results are in line with trends in housing prices and affordability levels reported elsewhere in the [OECD Affordable Housing Database](#). For instance, real house prices have increased in 34 OECD countries since 2005, while rent prices have increased in all but two OECD countries over the same period.

The economic fallout of the COVID-19 crisis has led to an even larger share of the population reporting that they face difficulty in affording adequate housing. People who are at risk of not being able to sustain their tenancy or homeownership status may face eviction (see [HC3.3 Evictions](#)) and/or homelessness ([HC3.1 Homeless population estimates](#)). Moreover, the trend towards higher levels of perceived

housing insecurity over the past decade underscore the challenge to meet the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal of ensuring "access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing" by 2030.

Figure HC1.4.4. On average, perceived housing insecurity has increased over the past decade

Share of people responding that there have been times in the past 12 months when they did not have enough money to provide adequate shelter or housing for them and their family, OECD and EU average, 2010-2021



Notes:

1. OECD30 refers to countries for which data are available for all years: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Lithuania, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Türkiye, the United Kingdom and the United States. EU22 refers to countries for which data are available for all years: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden.

2. The present publication presents time series which extend beyond the date of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union on 1 February 2020. In order to maintain consistency over time, the "European Union" aggregate presented here excludes the UK for the entire time series.

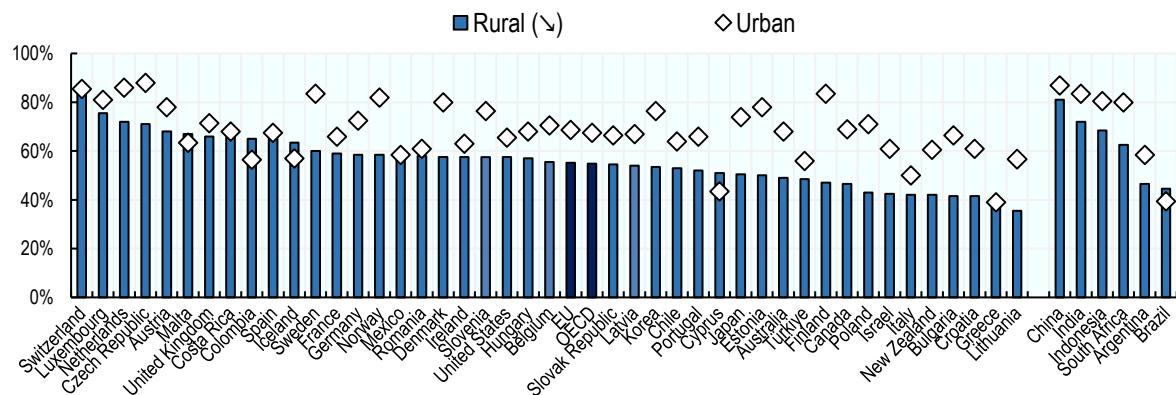
Source: Gallup World Poll (www.gallup.com).

Satisfaction with the public transportation systems varies greatly across and within countries

Satisfaction with the public transportation systems varies greatly across and within countries (Figure HC1.4.5). In most OECD and EU countries, urban residents are more satisfied with the public transportation systems compared to rural residents. More than 80% of urban respondents report to be satisfied with the public transportation systems in the Czech Republic, Finland, Luxembourg, Norway, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland, while this is the case for less than half of urban residents in Greece, Cyprus and Italy. The largest gaps within countries are observed in Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland and Poland, where satisfaction with the public transportation systems for rural residents is at least 25 percentage points lower than that of urban residents.

Figure HC1.4.5. Urban residents are more satisfied with the public transportation systems than rural residents

Share of people responding that they are satisfied with the public transportation systems, urban vs. rural areas, 2020/2021



Note: See Figure HC1.4.1.

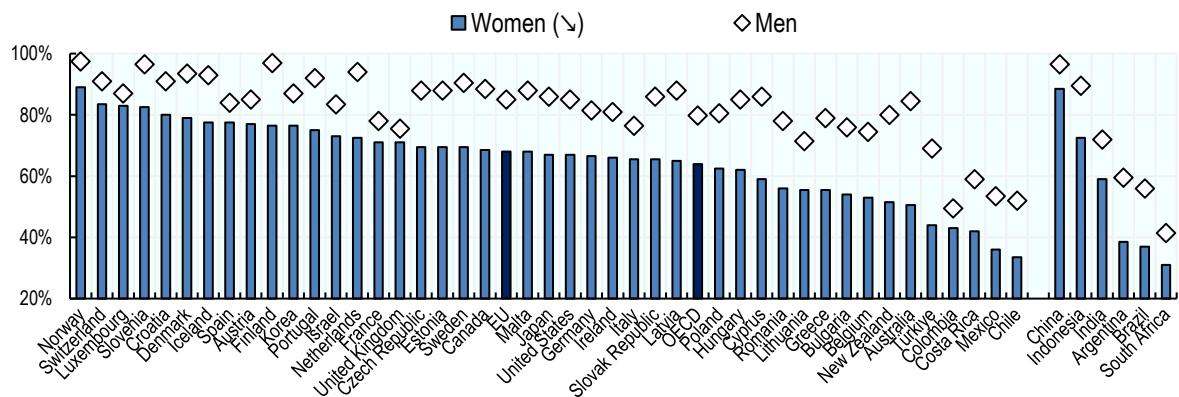
Source: Gallup World Poll (www.gallup.com).

Women feel less safe than men walking alone at night in the city or area where they live

In all countries, women report feeling less safe than men walking alone at night, with great variation across countries (Figure HC 1.4.6). On average, the gap between men and women is about 16 percentage points across the EU and the OECD. In Croatia, Luxembourg, Norway, Slovenia and Switzerland, more than 80% of women report feeling safe walking alone at night in the city or area where they live, compared to less than half of all adult women in Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Türkiye. The largest gaps between men and women (about 25 pp or more) are observed in Australia, Cyprus and New Zealand. Meanwhile, the gap between men and women is small (less than 5 pp) in Luxembourg and the United Kingdom. Safety is a concern for a large share of men as well, including Chile, Colombia and Mexico, where only about half of male respondents report feeling safe walking alone at night in the city or area where they live.

Figure HC1.4.6. Women feel less safe than men walking alone at night in the city or area where they live

Share of people responding that they feel safe walking alone at night in the city or area where they live, by gender, 2020/21



Note: See Figure HC1.4.1.

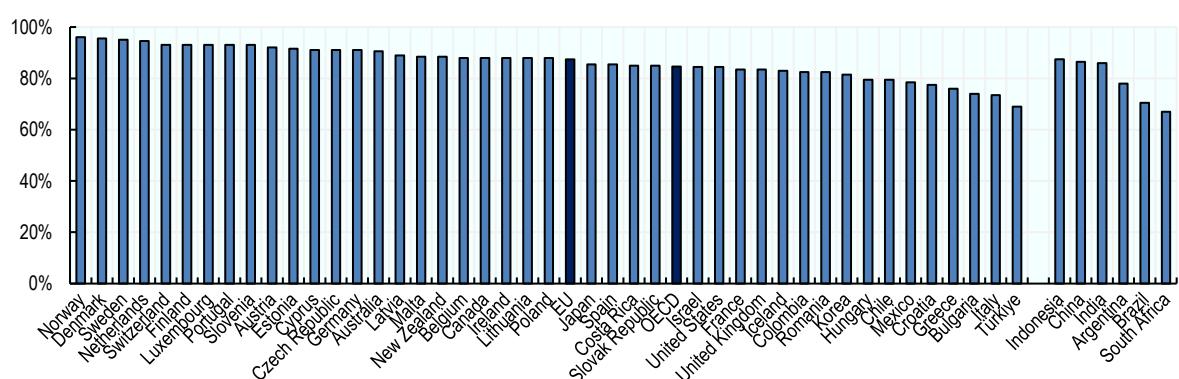
Source: Gallup World Poll (www.gallup.com).

On average, eight in ten people are satisfied with the city or area where they live

The highest level of satisfaction with one's living area is observed in Nordic countries, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Switzerland, where about 95% of respondents report being satisfied with the city or area where they live (Figure HC 1.4.7). Meanwhile, in Bulgaria, Italy and Türkiye, this is the case for about 70-75% of respondents. Overall satisfaction with living area depends on many factors, including, *inter alia*, housing affordability, housing quality, living environment, employment opportunities and access to quality public services.

Figure HC1.4.7. On average, eight in ten people are satisfied with the city or area where they live

Share of people responding that they are satisfied with the city or area where they live, 2020/21



Note: See Figure HC1.4.1.

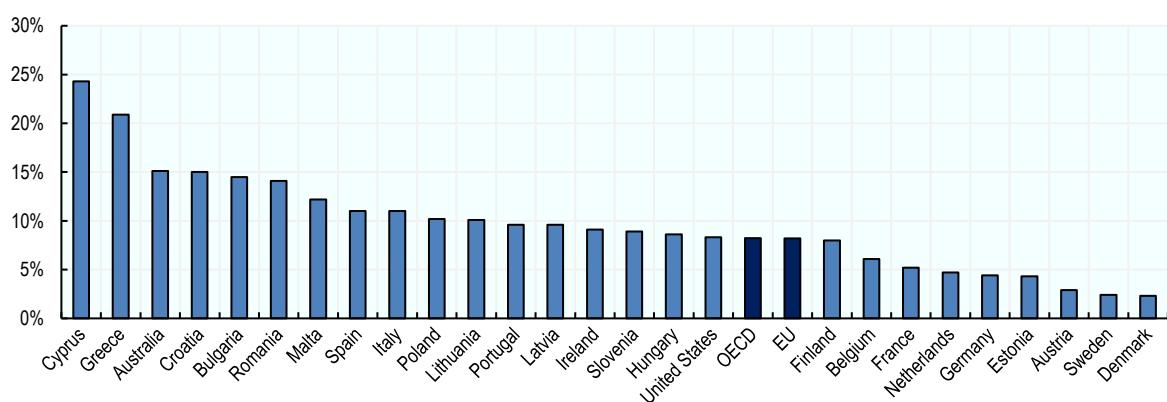
Source: Gallup World Poll (www.gallup.com).

Eight percent of respondents report that they struggled to pay their rent or mortgage

There is considerable variation between countries in the share of respondents who report having struggled to pay for their accommodation in the past 3 months (Figure HC1.4.8). The highest level of difficulty is reported in Cyprus and Greece, where over 20% of respondents struggled to pay their rent or mortgage. Meanwhile, in Austria, Denmark and Sweden, fewer than 3% of respondents report having struggled to pay for their accommodation. Overall, the OECD and EU averages report similar levels of difficulty, at around 8% of respondents.

Figure HC1.4.8. Eight percent of respondents report that they struggled to pay their rent or mortgage

Share of people responding that they have been unable to pay their rent or mortgage as scheduled at some time in the last 3 months, April/May 2020



Notes:

1. Data for the United States are drawn from the US Census Bureau and are therefore not fully comparable with data from European countries. Respondents in Europe were asked if at any time during the past 3 months, their household has been unable to pay as scheduled their rent or mortgage payments for accommodation. In the US, respondents were asked if their rent or mortgage from the last month was deferred.
2. Data for Australia were drawn from the Australian National University and are therefore not fully comparable with data from European countries. Respondents in Australia were asked if they were unable to pay their mortgage or rent on time in the last 3 months because of a shortage of money.

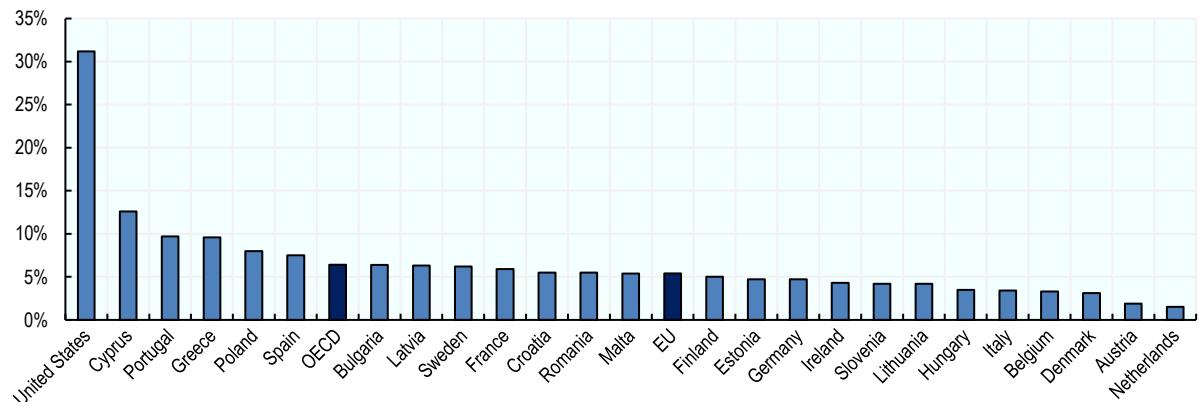
Sources: Australian National University Centre For Social Research & Methods (2020), COVID-19 and mortgage and rental payments; Eurofound (2021), Living, working and COVID-19 dataset, Dublin, <http://eurofound.link/covid19data>; US Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey (2021)

Around five percent of respondents report that they are likely to leave their accommodation due to affordability concerns

Apart from the United States, there is limited variation between countries in the share of respondents who report that they might have to leave their accommodation in the next 3 months because they can no longer afford it (Figure HC 1.4.9). Respondents in the United States report the highest level by far, at 31% in February/March 2021, more than doubling the second-highest rate in Cyprus at 13%. In both the OECD and EU, around 5% of respondents report that they are likely to leave their accommodation within 3 months. Austria and the Netherlands report the lowest levels, at below 2% of respondents. See indicator PH1.1 for an overview of emergency support measures introduced by governments at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic to help households stay in their homes.

Figure HC 1.4.9. Around five percent of respondents report that they are likely to leave their accommodation due to affordability concerns

Share of people responding that they will likely leave their accommodation within the next 3 months because they can no longer afford it, February/March 2021



Note:

1. Data for the United States are drawn from the US Census Bureau and are therefore not fully comparable with data from European countries. Respondents in Europe were asked about the likelihood that they will need to leave their accommodation within the next 3 months because they could no longer afford it. In the US, respondents were asked about the likelihood of leaving their home due to foreclosure or eviction in the next 2 months.

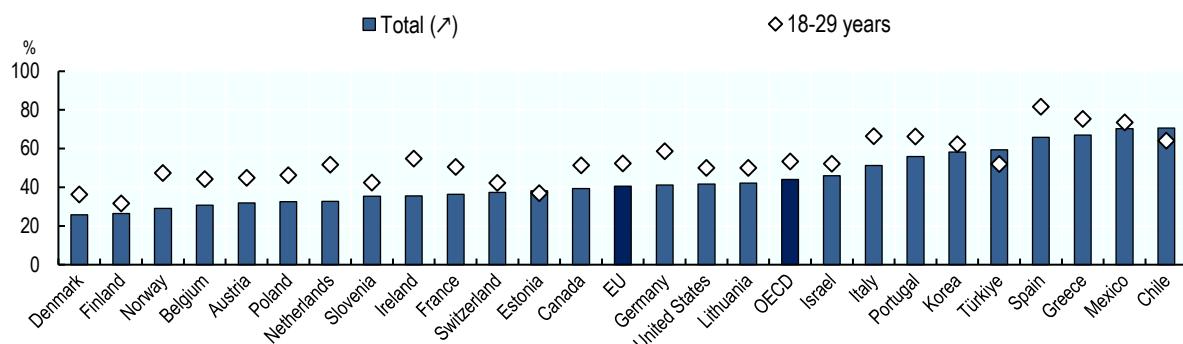
Sources: Eurofound (2021), Living, working and COVID-19 dataset, Dublin, <http://eurofound.link/covid19data>; US Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey (2021).

Young adults are more likely than other age groups to report being concerned about housing

According to the *OECD Risks That Matter Survey 2020*, on average across the 25 participating OECD countries, 44% of respondents reported to be either "somewhat concerned or very concerned" by not being able to find/maintain adequate housing in the short term (the next year or two) (Figure HC1.4.10). In all countries but two (Chile and Türkiye), the share of youth (aged 18-29 years old) reporting to be either "somewhat concerned or very concerned" is higher than the share of the overall population. Ireland, the Netherlands and Norway record close to a 20-percentage point difference between youth and the overall population. In Chile, Greece, Italy, Korea, Portugal, Mexico and Spain, more than 60% of youth report to be either "somewhat concerned or very concerned" by not being able to find/maintain adequate housing.

Figure HC1.4.10 Young people are more concerned about housing than the rest of the population

Percent of respondents reporting being either "somewhat concerned" or "very concerned" by not being able to find/maintain adequate housing, by age group, 2020



Note:

1. Respondents were asked: What are your specific short-term worries? Thinking about the near future (the next year or two), how concerned are you about not being able to find/maintain adequate housing? Respondents had the option of selecting not at all, not so concerned, somewhat, very concerned, and can't choose.

Source: OECD Secretariat estimates based on OECD Risks That Matter 2020 survey, <http://oe.cd/rtm>.

Data and comparability issues

The Gallup World Poll asked respondents the following questions: "In the city or area where you live, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the availability of good, affordable housing?", "Have there been times in the past 12 months when you did not have enough money to provide adequate shelter or housing for you and your family?", "In the city or area where you live, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the public transportation systems? "Do you feel safe walking alone at night in the city or area where you live?", and "Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the city or area where you live?"

The Gallup World Poll is conducted in more than 150 countries around the world based on a common questionnaire. The results are based on telephone and face-to-face interviews with approximately 1 000 adults in each country. With few exceptions, all samples are probability-based and nationally representative of the resident population aged 15 years and over in the entire country. Data are available by some socio-demographic groups. While this data source ensures a high degree of comparability across countries, results may be affected by sampling and non-sampling errors as well as variation in response rates. For these reasons, the data have been averaged across two years, i.e. 2020-2021 in this indicator. Since questions from a common questionnaire are translated in each country language, translation and interpretation concerns may affect comparison across countries.

This indicator also presents data from the Eurofound (2021) *Living, working and COVID-19* dataset. This consists of a survey for European residents, which asks respondents: "Has your household been in arrears at any time during the past 3 months, that is, unable to pay as scheduled... rent or mortgage payments for accommodation?" Data for the United States are drawn from the US Census Bureau (2021), *Household Pulse Survey*, which asked respondents for "last month's payment status." Data for Australia are drawn from the Australia National University (2020) Centre for Social Research & Methods, which asked respondents if they were "not able to pay the mortgage or rent on time in last 3 months because of a shortage of money."

In the second question of the Eurofound survey, respondents are asked: "How likely or unlikely do you think it is that you will need to leave your accommodation within the next 3 months because you can no

longer afford it? In the United States, respondents were asked the “likelihood of having to leave this house in next two months due to foreclosure or eviction.” Due to the differences in the questions asked, data from Australia and the United States are not fully comparable with data from the Eurofound survey.

This indicator also presents results from the *OECD Risks That Matter Survey 2020*. The *OECD Risks that Matter* (RTM) survey is a cross-national survey examining people’s perceptions of the social and economic risks they face and how well they think their government addresses those risks. The survey was conducted for the first time in two waves in 2018. The 2020 survey, conducted in September–October 2020, draws on a representative sample of over 25 000 people aged 18 to 64 years old in the 25 OECD countries that agreed to participate: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Korea, Lithuania, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Türkiye and the United States. Respondents were asked about their social and economic concerns, how well they think government responds to their needs and expectations, and what policies they would like to see in the future.

As discussed in OECD (2020), there are many factors that may affect people’s reported levels of satisfaction, which may differ across socio-economic groups, age or income-levels, the overall level of social protection policies available in their country, or the overall economic environment in the country. A more extensive discussion of the potential limitations of subjective measures is discussed in OECD (2013), *OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being*.

Sources and further reading

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