

Living with the coronavirus: the consumer perspective on the COVID-19 pandemic

According to our calculations, the money lost by households due to the COVID-19 outbreak, amounts up till now to €1.4 billion in Belgium, €12.3 billion in Italy, €1.4 billion in Portugal and €6.3 billion in Spain

Brussels, March 25th - As the coronavirus continues to spread, most European governments are slowly imposing lockdowns. Businesses are starting to close, streets are being deserted and home confinement is becoming a new reality for millions of EU citizens.

In light of the recent developments, Euroconsumers, along with its member organisations (Altroconsumo - Italy, OCU - Spain, DECO Proteste - Portugal and Test Achats/Test Aankoop - Belgium), decided to conduct another survey¹, between the 18th and 20th of March, with the aim of gauging how consumer attitudes have changed with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly since the publishing of our [first survey](#), carried out between the 5th and 9th of March.

In all four countries, the majority of the population is *strictly following* the recommendations from the relevant authorities by not leaving their homes (68% in Portugal, 70% in Belgium and 90% in Italy and Spain). Moreover, we have found overall that older citizens tend to follow recommendations to a greater extent to the younger generations. Likewise, women respect experts' advice more than men.

Our research also shows that an important portion of the population in all countries has experienced at least 1 COVID-19 symptom in the last 2 weeks (figures range from 33% in Portugal to 53% in Belgium). However, what is rather alarming is the extremely small number of these people who have gone into *full quarantine*. Here the figures of people who went into *full quarantine* after having experienced *at least 1* of the main COVID-19 related symptoms are 27% in Belgium, 30% in Italy, 12% in Portugal and 21% in Spain.

A significant proportion of the population is working from home in all countries. In fact, of all *professionally active* respondents, around 30% are *completely working from home*. However, most citizens cannot afford to do so. As such, a greater percentage is being hit even harder by the coronavirus as between 55% to 60% of *professionals* in all countries are either *not working* or are *going to work despite home confinement rules*. With respect to the availability of necessity goods, only a minority, in all countries, find it "*very difficult*" to buy daily products such as food and hygiene products (Belgium has the highest figure with 9%, Spain the lowest with 4%).

¹ **METHODOLOGY & SAMPLING:** An online questionnaire was elaborated in English, then translated and adapted to the national contexts. In the four countries a representative sample of the general population ranging from 18 to 74 years old was used. Answers have been weighted in order to reflect the distribution of the national populations in terms of gender, regions and educational level. The results can be considered as representative trends of the national populations. Number of valid answers collected by country: BELGIUM: 1.010, ITALY:1.007, PORTUGAL: 1.002, SPAIN:1.015

Our investigation also shows that, particularly in Italy and Belgium, the population is increasingly becoming lonely and scared. Indeed, 17% and 20%, respectively experience loneliness *frequently/always*. Similarly, 24% and 28% are *frequently/always* scared. While in Spain and Portugal these figures are somewhat lower, they are nonetheless significant. Moreover, between 5% and 11% of the adult population in the four countries experiences a *very serious mental impact* due to the coronavirus.

As to the financial implications of the coronavirus, we regrettably found that around half of the households in each country have already lost money due to the epidemic (50% in Belgium, 50% in Italy, 46% in Portugal and 54% in Spain). These percentages do not include financial loss on money investments. More specifically, “*loss of professional income*” was the most frequently cited reason in all countries (around 30% in Italy, Spain and Portugal). According to our calculations total losses due to the COVID-19 outbreak amount, up until now, to €1.4 billion in Belgium, €12.3 billion in Italy, €1.4 billion in Portugal and €6.3 billion in Spain. Within families reporting to have lost money on their investments (e.g. stock market), the estimated average lost virtual amount by 19th of March was around 16.000€ in Belgium, 8.500€ in Italy, 5.500€ in Portugal and 6.000€ in Spain.

*“Clearly, the COVID-19 pandemic is taking the world by storm. Every day, the situation is becoming more serious, and experts unfortunately claim that the worst is yet to come. Households are increasingly under pressure, not only due to the sanitary, physical and psychological impacts of the coronavirus crisis, but also because of its financial implications. For this reason, Euroconsumers calls on the EU institutions to not lose sight of consumers and citizens in this crisis. Safeguarding their protection will be just as relevant as supporting ailing businesses if we want to revive the economy in a responsible and sustainable way. Now, more than ever, is the time for our leaders to show us the true meaning of European solidarity and the value of the European Union,” says **Marco Pierani**, Head of Public Affairs at Euroconsumers.*

To anyone reading, please strictly follow the recommendations set out by your national authorities. For more information, please visit our [Coronavirus Blog](#), where we outline the concrete actions and campaigns that we are undertaking at the national level in all of our member countries.

Gathering five national consumer organisations and giving voice to a total of more than 1.5 million people, Euroconsumers is the world’s leading consumer cluster in terms of innovative information, personalized services and defense of consumer’s rights. Our organisations work closely together and with BEUC, The European Consumer Organisation, and Consumers International to ensure consumers are safe, that markets are fair and benefit from honest relations with businesses and authorities.

