

FRANCE

July 2021

www.oecd.org/social/risks-that-matter.htm

The French worry about economic insecurity in spite of their social safety net

The OECD's cross-national Risks that Matter survey examines people's perceptions of social and economic risks and how well they feel their government reacts to their concerns. The survey polled a representative sample of 25000 people aged 18 to 64 years old in 25 OECD countries to understand better what citizens want and need from social policy – particularly in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the short run, the most widely-held concern for French respondents (cited by 60%) is not being able to make ends meet (Fig. 1). When looking beyond the next decade, the primary concern is not being financially secure during old age (cited by 73%).

This feeling of economic insecurity is accompanied by a scepticism of government financial support. Less than a third (31%) of RTM 2020 respondents in France say they are confident that the government would provide cash benefits or services sufficient to get them through the financial difficulties.

Yet this perception does not necessarily match actual benefits offered. During the pandemic, for example, France offered a job retention (JR) scheme that paid a replacement rate of 70% (at the average wage) during the crisis, up to a ceiling of EUR 4 849 monthly, and an unemployment benefit equal to 57% of the average wage. About 35% of dependent employed French workers took up the short-time work scheme in April-May 2020. This is a more generous JR scheme (and a higher enrolment) than in Belgium, for example, where respondents are eight percentage points more likely than in France to say that their government would provide cash benefits or services sufficient to

get them through the financial difficulties.

This mismatch between (relative) dissatisfaction and benefit levels could be related to perceived access. 50% of French respondents feel that they could not access social programmes or benefits if they needed them. Within that subgroup, 65% say they do not know whether they would qualify for benefits and 39% say they think the application process would be difficult, lengthy and/or time consuming

About half of respondents in France want the government to do more to ensure their economic and social security, much less than the crossnational average of 68% (Fig. 3). However, perhaps related to France's relatively expansive social safety net, France is also one of the countries with the largest share of people saying that government should be spending as much as it does now. France also leads in the share of respondents who say they want government to spend less (15%), followed by Poland (12%), Turkey (12%) and the United States (11%).

While there is general support for paying more in taxes for specific policies areas – more than 60% of French people say they would pay more to benefit from better provision of health services, pensions, and long-term care – this support drops when a specific price tag of 2% of income is mentioned. Like other countries with relatively low levels of inequality, France has relatively less support for more redistribution than other countries -- although still nearly half of the people say that government should redistribute more to reduce income inequality (Fig. 2).

Fig. 1. Percent identifying 'not being able to make ends meet' as the top short-term risk to themselves or their family

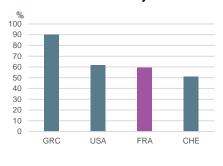


Fig. 2. Demand for more redistribution associated with inequality

Share of respondents (%) who answer "more" or "much more" when asked whether government should redistribute more or tax the rich more, relative to Gini index of disposable income (x-axis)

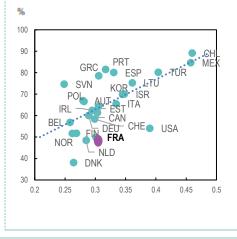
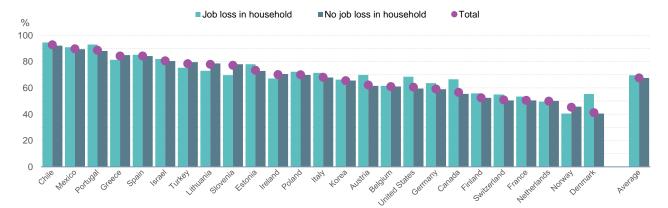


Fig. 3. About half of French people want government to do more to ensure their social and economic security



Notes: Respondents were asked whether they thought the government should be doing less, more, or the same as they are currently doing to ensure their economic and social security. Possible response options were "much less", "less", "about the same as now", "more" and "much more". Respondents could also choose "don't know". "Job loss in household" refers to respondents reporting that either they or any member of their household have/has either "Lost their job or been laid off permanently by their employer" and/or "Lost their self-employed job or their own business", since the start of the COVID 19 pandemic. Figure shows the aggregated share of respondents selecting "more" or "much more," by job loss status.

Source: OECD Secretariat estimates based on the OECD Risks That Matter 2020 survey, https://www.oecd.org/social/risks-that-matter.htm

The OECD Risks that Matter (RTM) survey is a cross-national survey examining people's 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. The survey was conducted for the first time in 2018 to support the OECD Social Policy Ministerial. The 2020 survey, conducted in September-October 2020, draws on nationally-representative samples in Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Korea, Lithuania, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey and the United States.