

### The COVID-19 pandemic: detecting impacts and monitoring the recovery

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This article is a part of a [set of statistical articles](#), which are based on the Eurostat publication 'Sustainable development in the European Union — Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context — 2021 edition'. This report is the fifth edition of Eurostat's series of monitoring reports on sustainable development, which provide a quantitative assessment of progress of the EU towards the SDGs in an EU context.

### The COVID-19 pandemic: detecting impacts and monitoring the recovery

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has a significant impact on every aspect of life worldwide, from public health, economic and social stability to the environment. It affects the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs broadly, influencing all three dimensions of sustainability and threatening the achievement of the global goals. While the full-scale effects of the pandemic remain to be seen, short-term data collected by Eurostat and published in the [European Statistical Recovery Dashboard](#) can provide some indications of how COVID-19 and the related contingency measures are affecting the EU in its attempts to achieve the SDGs. The analysis below is using breakdowns of the EU SDG indicators to assess the impact on specific population groups as well as proxy indicators such as electricity consumption for illustrating the environmental effects of the lockdowns put in place in response to the pandemic.

### There were almost 600 000 additional deaths in the EU in 2020

With more than 30 million COVID-19 cases in the EU and more than half a million deaths linked to the virus<sup>1</sup>, public health concerns ( [SDG 3](#) ) remain one of the most important effects of the pandemic. [Excess mortality](#) <sup>2</sup>in the EU witnessed two peaks in 2020, following two waves of new COVID-19 cases (see Figure 1). In April 2020, there were 25.1 % more deaths compared with the 2016 to 2019 average, while in November 2020 additional deaths peaked at 40.6 %. In total, from March to December 2020, 580 000 more deaths occurred in the EU compared with the same period from 2016 to 2019<sup>3</sup>.

While there is no confirmation that all excess deaths are due to COVID-19, there exists a clear link between excess

<sup>1</sup>By 5 May 2021, <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/cases-2019-ncov-eueea>

<sup>2</sup>Excess mortality is the rate of additional deaths in a month compared with the average number of deaths in the same month over a baseline period. It refers to deaths from all causes.

<sup>3</sup> Eurostat (2021), [580 000 excess deaths between March and December 2020](#).

mortality and the pandemic's outbreak. Older people are disproportionately affected, due to their higher death risk of COVID-19, outbreaks in elderly care facilities and possible difficulties in access to [health care](#) . Data show that while there were no additional deaths in 2020 compared with 2019 for people under the age of 20, excess mortality reached 13.0 % and 15.0 % for people aged 60 to 79 and people aged 80 or over, respectively. Excess mortality for men (14.4 %) was higher than for women (12.3 %) in 2020 compared with 2019<sup>4</sup>.

Changes in mortality conditions also had an impact on overall life expectancy in the EU, which is estimated to have decreased by 0.9 years, from 81.3 years in 2019 to 80.4 years in 2020<sup>5</sup>. The change was slightly stronger for men (- 1.0 years) than for women (- 0.8 years). Life expectancy at age 65 also decreased by about a year in 2020, but in percentage terms this decrease amounted to 4.0 %, compared with a 1.1 % decline of life expectancy at birth. In particular older men appear to have been hit disproportionately hard, with their life expectancy at age 65 decreasing by 5.5 % from 2019 to 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic also revealed [existing inequalities \(SDG 10\)](#) . Some individuals are more vulnerable than the rest of the population to the virus itself, as well as to the consequences of the lockdown measures, which have exacerbated their already challenging life situations. These people include, among others, older people, people with underlying health conditions, migrants, people living in poor housing conditions, homeless people, people living in abusive household settings and people with disabilities. Each of these groups faces specific challenges. Ethnic minorities work disproportionately in jobs that expose them to risk of a COVID-19 infection (for example, delivery drivers). The ability of old and disabled people to seek or receive medical help, to exercise or to run errands is compromised due to the measures implemented to prevent the spread the infection. People living in abusive households are even more exposed to domestic violence during social isolation periods<sup>6</sup>.

COVID-19 can also cause persistent ill-health. The so-called long COVID (when symptoms persist for more than a month) has a serious impact on people's ability to go back to work or have a social life. It affects their mental health and may have significant economic consequences for them, their families and for society<sup>7</sup>. It has also been reported that the COVID-19 pandemic increased the risk of developing mental health conditions, especially among young people. Additionally, health care and other frontline workers are facing an especially high risk of stress, anxiety, depression, insomnia and post-traumatic stress disorder<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup>Source: own calculations based on Eurostat ([demo\\_r\\_mwk\\_20](#)) . Data refer to EU excluding Ireland.

<sup>5</sup>EU data for 2020 are provisional estimates based on the available Member States' data for that year; source: Eurostat ([demo\\_mlexpec](#)) .

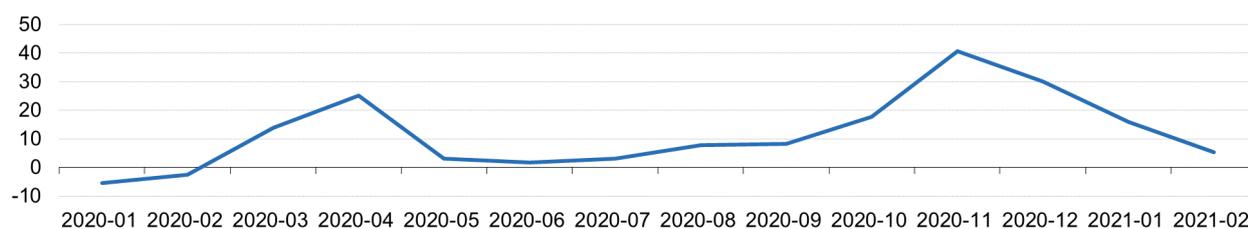
<sup>6</sup> European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (2020), [Guidance on the provision of support for medically and socially vulnerable populations in EU/EEA countries and the United Kingdom during the COVID-19 pandemic](#), Stockholm.

<sup>7</sup> European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies (2021), [In the wake of the pandemic: Preparing for Long COVID](#), Policy Brief 39.

<sup>8</sup> OECD/European Union (2020), [Health at a Glance: Europe 2020: State of Health in the EU Cycle](#), OECD Publishing, Paris.

## Excess mortality, EU, 2020-2021

(% of additional deaths compared with average monthly deaths in 2016-2019)



Note: Data are provisional estimates.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: demo\_mexrt)

eurostat 

**Figure 1: Excess mortality, EU, 2020-2021** (% of additional deaths compared with average monthly deaths in 2016-2019) Source: Eurostat (demo\_mexrt)

## The EU economy contracted by 6.2 % in 2020 compared with 2019

Following the lockdown measures put in place by EU Member States in order to halt the spread of the virus, the EU's economy ( [SDG 8](#) ) showed negative trends in 2020. In the second quarter of 2020, the EU's [GDP](#) dropped by 11.2 %, which resulted in an annual drop of real GDP per capita by 6.2 % in 2020 compared with 2019. Industrial production<sup>9</sup> ( [SDG 9](#) and [SDG 12](#) ) experienced the biggest drop in April 2020, by 19.0 %, leading to an annual decrease of 8.0 % in 2020 compared with 2019<sup>10</sup>. EU imports from other countries ( [SDG 17](#) ) have also declined, by 10.7 % in March 2020 compared with the previous month. Imports from African countries dropped especially strongly, by 32.6 % from March to April. As a result of these fluctuations, extra-EU imports fell by 11.7 % in 2020 compared with 2019<sup>11</sup>.

Despite the economic recession, [official development assistance](#) of the EU institutions amounted to EUR 18.3 billion in 2020, a 25.4 % increase compared with the previous year. Out of these, EUR 7.9 billion were spent on COVID-19 related activities<sup>12</sup>.

The COVID-19 crisis created an extraordinary need for governments to respond to the pandemic and protect jobs and livelihoods, for example by introducing short-time working schemes. Throughout 2020, government measures aimed at mitigating the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in [general government gross debt](#), which climbed to 90.8 % of the EU's GDP in the fourth quarter of the year (see Figure 3). This was 13.2 percentage points higher than in the fourth quarter of 2019.

<sup>9</sup>Industrial production covers the following sectors: mining and quarrying; manufacturing; electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply.

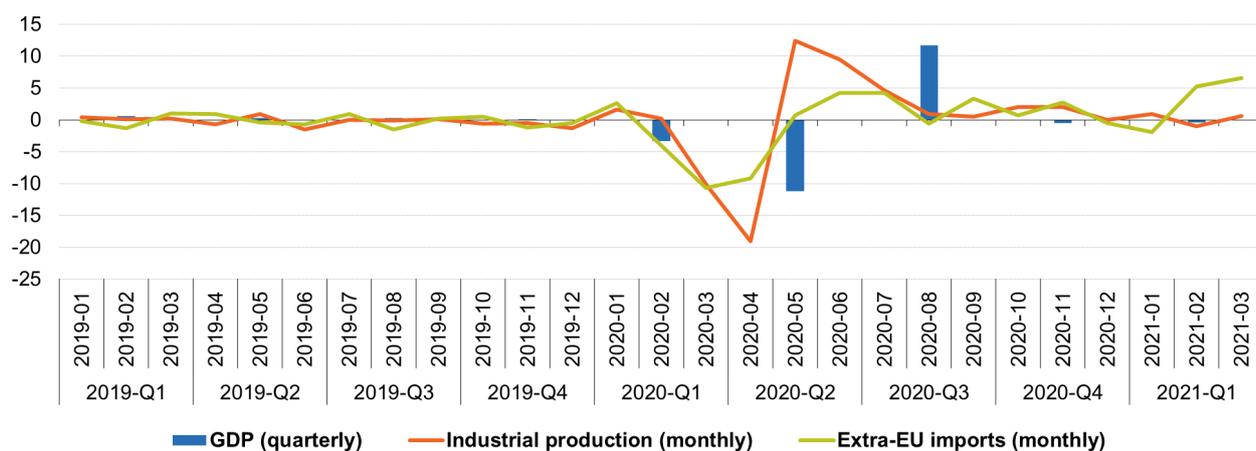
<sup>10</sup>Source: Eurostat (online data code: [\(sts\\_inpr\\_a\)](#) ).

<sup>11</sup>Source: Eurostat (online data code: [\(ext\\_lt\\_maineu\)](#) ).

<sup>12</sup>OECD (2021), [COVID-19 spending helped to lift foreign aid to an all-time high in 2020](#), Detailed Note, OECD, Paris, p. 8 and p. 10. USD were converted to EUR based on the average annual exchange rate ([\(ert\\_bil\\_eur\\_a\)](#))

## GDP, industrial production and imports, EU, 2019-2021

(% change on previous period)



Note: Seasonally and calendar-adjusted data; data for industrial production for March 2021 are estimated.

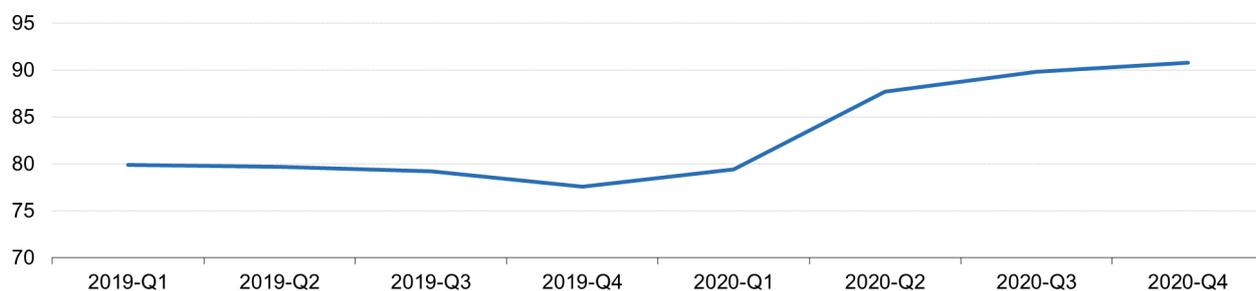
Source: Eurostat (online data codes: namq\_10\_gdp, sts\_inpr\_m, ext\_st\_eu27\_2020sitc)

eurostat

**Figure 2: GDP, industrial production and imports, EU, 2019-2021 (% change on previous period)** Source: Eurostat (namq\_10\_gdp), (sts\_inpr\_m) and (ext\_st\_eu27\_2020sitc)

## General government gross debt, EU, 2019-2020

(% of GDP)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: gov\_10q\_ggdebt)

eurostat

**Figure 3: General government gross debt, EU, 2019-2020 (% of GDP)** Source: Eurostat (gov\_10q\_ggdebt)

## The COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the EU's labour market, with young people being hit hardest

The measures introduced by EU Member States such as short-time work schemes helped cushion the pandemic's negative impact on the EU's labour market ( [SDG 8](#) ). Available data show strong fluctuations in the in [labour market](#) in the second quarter of 2020, with many people moving from [employment](#) and [unemployment](#) to economic inactivity and thus dropping out of the labour market<sup>13</sup>. In the second quarter of 2020, the number of employed people aged 20 to 64 fell by 2.1 % compared with the first quarter, while the number of economically inactive people rose by 5.5 % for the same age group. As people started re-entering the labour market in the third quarter of 2020, the number of unemployed people aged 15 to 74 increased by 9.9 % (see Figure 4). Despite these fluctuations, the total (annual) [employment rate](#) fell by only 0.7 percentage points, from 73.1 % in 2019 to 72.4 % in 2020. Conversely, the annual unemployment rate only increased from 6.7 % in 2019 to 7.1 % in 2020.

<sup>13</sup>Source: Eurostat, [Labour Force Survey \(LFS\) — detailed quarterly survey results](#) .

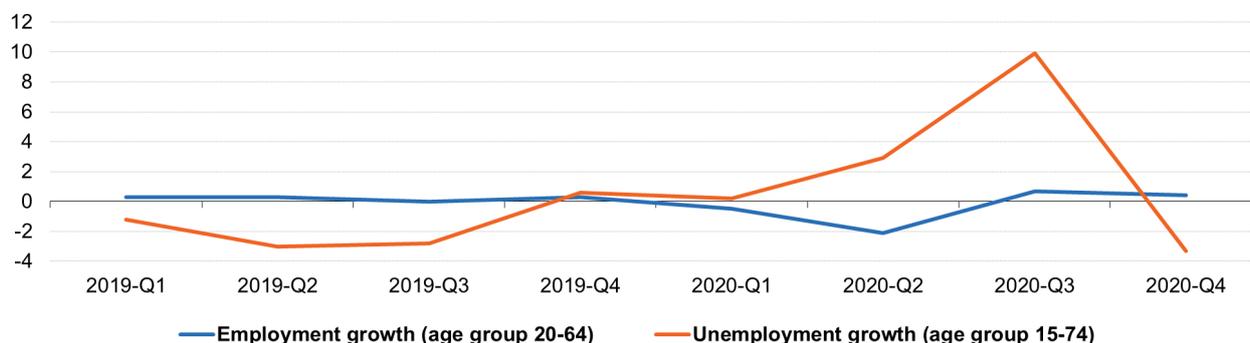
The labour market situation of young people was particularly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of employed people aged 15 to 24 dropped by 8.8 % in the second quarter of 2020, while the number of unemployed people of the same age increased by 11.5 % by the third quarter of 2020. Moreover, the number of **young people aged 15 to 29 neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET)** also increased by 13.4 % in the second quarter of 2020 compared with the previous quarter. This resulted in an annual NEET rate of 13.7 % in 2020, 1.1 percentage points higher than in 2019.

Non-EU citizens were also disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Between 2019 and 2020, the number of unemployed non-EU citizens aged 15 to 74 increased by 15.1 %, while for EU home country nationals the share grew by just 2.7 %<sup>14</sup>. Low-educated people (ISCED levels 0–2) were another group affected by the crisis, with their employment falling by 4.4 % in the second quarter of 2020<sup>15</sup>. The decrease was slightly slower for people with a medium-level education (ISCED levels 3–4), with 3.0 %, while the number of employed people with a tertiary education (ISCED levels 5–8) continued to increase in the second quarter and fell by only 2.0 % in the third quarter.

When segregated by gender (SDG 5), data show no significant differences between men and women when it comes to the fall in employment or the increase in unemployment in the EU in 2020, even though women are overrepresented in some of the hardest hit sectors (such as hospitality, retail and care) and took on a larger share of caretaking responsibilities. The gender employment gap has slightly narrowed since the start of the pandemic, reaching 11.2 percentage points in the fourth quarter of 2020, compared with 11.7 percentage points at the end of 2019.

### Employment and unemployment growth, EU, 2019-2020

(% change on previous period)



Note: Seasonally adjusted data.

Source: Eurostat (online data codes: lfsi\_emp\_q and une\_rt\_q)

eurostat

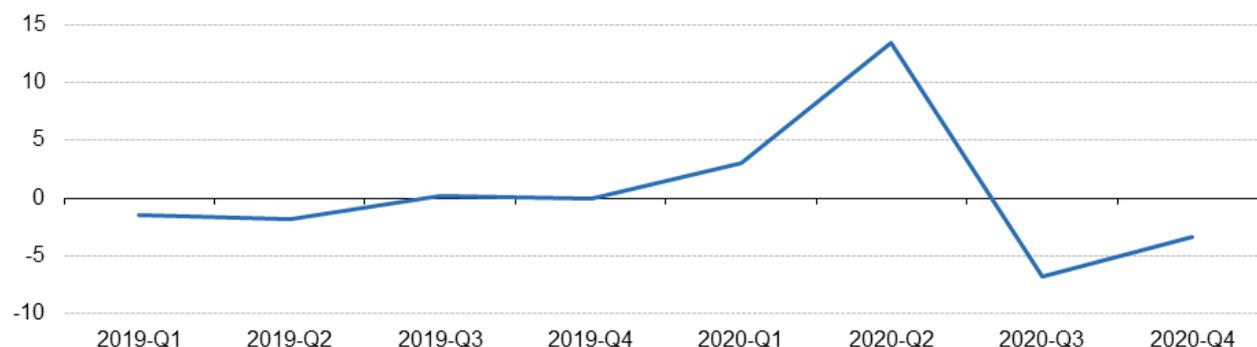
**Figure 4: Employment and unemployment growth, EU, 2019-2020 (% change on previous period) Source: Eurostat (lfsi\_emp\_q) and (une\_rt\_q)**

<sup>14</sup>Source: Eurostat (lfsa\_ugan) .

<sup>15</sup>Source: Eurostat (lfsq\_egised) .

## Growth of young people (aged 15-29) neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET), EU, 2019-2020

(% change on previous period)



Note: Seasonally adjusted data.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: lfsi\_neet\_q)

eurostat 

**Figure 5: Growth of young people (aged 15-29) neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET), EU, 2019-2020 (% change on previous period) Source: Eurostat (lfsi\_neet\_q)**

## The EU's electricity consumption fell by more than 4 % in 2020

The effects of the lockdown measures on the environmental dimension are more difficult to estimate because environmental indicators are usually reported with a time lag of one to several years. However, it is already clear that the COVID-19 crisis is having a direct impact on energy use and **greenhouse gas (GHG)** emissions at both global and EU levels ( **SDG 13** )<sup>16</sup>. The transport sector, a key source of GHG emissions, was particularly affected by the crisis ( **SDG 9** ). This is illustrated by the number of commercial air flights, which dropped by 91.2 % in April 2020 compared with April 2019. In December 2020, air traffic still remained 66.9 % lower than in the same month of the previous year.

The lockdown measures and related restrictions on social life also led to a drop in energy consumption in 2020 ( **SDG 7** ), with a clear drop in **fossil fuel** consumption in all EU Member States. This is illustrated by the trends in electricity consumption, which decreased by 13.0 % in April 2020 compared with April 2019. Overall, electricity consumption is estimated to have fallen by 4.4 % in 2020 compared with 2019<sup>17</sup>. The decrease in energy consumption is also reflected in **carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions** from fossil fuel combustion ( **SDG 13** ), which, according to Eurostat estimates, have seen a significant decrease of 10 % in 2020 compared with the previous year<sup>18</sup>.

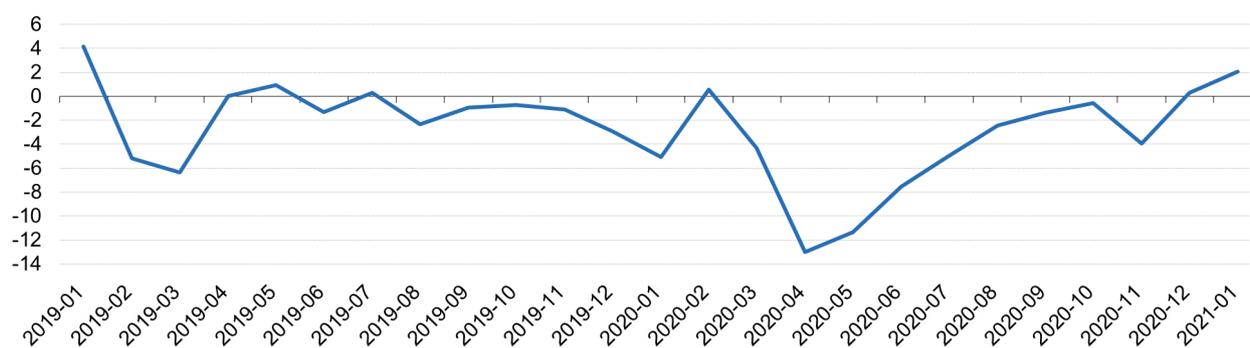
<sup>16</sup> EEA (2020), COVID-19 and Europe's environment: impacts of a global pandemic, Briefing No 13/2020.

<sup>17</sup>Source: own calculations based on Eurostat (nrg\_cb\_eim) .

<sup>18</sup> Eurostat (2021), CO2 emissions from energy use clearly decreased in the EU in 2020.

## Electricity consumption, EU, 2019-2021

(% change compared with same period of previous year)



Source: Eurostat (online data codes: nrg\_cb\_eim)

eurostat

**Figure 6: Electricity consumption, EU, 2019-2021 (% change compared with same period of previous year)**

Source: Eurostat (lfsi\_emp\_q) and (nrg\_cb\_eim)

## Conclusions and outlook

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, progress towards the SDGs in the EU was uneven, with some areas requiring more focused attention and action. The pandemic has made the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs even more challenging, both for the EU and globally<sup>19</sup>. Increased mortality and health implications of COVID-19 are the most obvious negative consequences of the pandemic. The lockdown measures put in place to halt the spread of the virus negatively influenced the EU's economy and labour market, which in turn put additional pressure on vulnerable population groups. Even though some positive effects on, for example resource and energy use, might be visible, it is possible that these short-term trends are temporary and that consumption patterns will return to pre-crisis levels in the pandemic's aftermath.

Despite these negative trends, the EU's response to the crisis showed that the economic and social impacts of the coronavirus pandemic can be mitigated. By the end of May 2021, almost half of the adult EU population had been vaccinated with at least one dose and the delivery of vaccines keeps speeding up<sup>20</sup>. The economy is also already recovering and, according to the European Commission's latest Economic Forecast, is expected to grow by 4.2 % in 2021<sup>21</sup>. Most of the employment indicators showed improvements in the third and fourth quarters of 2020 as well.

The long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the EU economy, labour market, education and poverty, as well as on environmental issues, however, remain to be seen. With more data becoming available, future SDG monitoring reports might present a different picture about the consequences of the pandemic.

## See also

- [All articles on sustainable development goals](#)

<sup>19</sup>UN (2020), [The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020](#) ; and SDSN and IEEP (2020), [The 2020 Europe Sustainable Development Report: Meeting the Sustainable Development Goals in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic](#). Sustainable Development Solutions Network and Institute for European Environmental Policy, Paris and Brussels.

<sup>20</sup> European Commission (2021), [Safe COVID-19 vaccines for Europeans](#).

<sup>21</sup> European Commission (2021), [European Economic Forecast, Spring 2021](#), Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, p. 1.

## Database

- [Sustainable Development Indicators](#)

## Dedicated section

- [Sustainable Development Indicators](#)

## Methodology

More detailed information on EU SDG indicators for monitoring of progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as indicator relevance, definitions, methodological notes, background and potential linkages, can be found in the [introduction](#) of the publication '[Sustainable development in the European Union — Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGS in an EU context — 2021 edition](#)' .

## Publications

### Further reading on COVID-19

- [European Environment Agency \(2020\), Air Quality in Europe 2020 Report, EEA Report No 9/2020, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.](#)
- [European Environment Agency \(2020\), COVID-19 and the environment: explore what we know.](#)
- [European Environment Agency \(2021\), Briefing: COVID-19 and Europe's environment: impacts of a global pandemic.](#)
- [European Commission \(2021\), EU research and innovation in action against the coronavirus.](#)
- [Eurostat \(2021\), Excess mortality starting to fall back in 2021, after a large death toll.](#)

## External links

### Further data sources on COVID-19

- [EuroMOMO, Graphs and Maps.](#)
- [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, COVID-19 Vaccine Tracker.](#)
- [European Environment Agency, Air quality and COVID-19.](#)