

*“Key figures on Europe”* contains a selection of key indicators for the European Union (EU) and its individual Member States, drawing from the rich collection of data that are available at Eurostat.

In recent years, the total number of inhabitants in the EU has grown at a relatively slow pace (compared with historical developments). On 1 January 2021, the population of the EU stood at 447.2 million, which was 278 000 less than a year before. Aside from two small contractions in 2010 and 2011, this was the only decrease recorded in the EU’s population during the last six decades.

There are considerable differences in population levels between EU Member States: on 1 January 2021, the number of inhabitants ranged from 0.5 million in Malta up to 83.2 million in Germany. Together, Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Poland comprised 66.0 % of the EU’s population.

Population ageing has been observed across much of Europe in recent decades. Changes in population structure can have serious implications for issues such as pension funds, government revenues and the provision of services such as health and social care. The number of working-age people (defined here as those aged from 20 to 64 years) in the EU expressed relative to the number of older persons (aged 65 years or over) fell from 3.9 in 2001 to 2.8 by 2021. According to Eurostat’s baseline projections, this ratio is expected to fall to 1.6 by 2080.

The COVID-19 crisis led to a fall in life expectancy in both 2020 and – to a lesser degree – 2021. Life expectancy at birth in 2021 was 82.8 years for women and 77.2 years for men, with the narrowing of the gender gap witnessed during the last two decades being reversed during the pandemic. Among the EU Member States, the highest average (for both sexes) life expectancy at birth in 2021 was recorded in Spain (at 83.3 years), while the lowest was in Bulgaria (71.4 years). A gender gap – with higher life expectancy for women – existed in every EU Member State.

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis was quite different in 2021, which may (in part) reflect fewer and less severe lockdown arrangements and a gradual return to work. The EU labour force aged 20–64 years grew 1.3 % in 2021 (compared with 2020) while the number of persons employed increased 1.5 %. There was also a partial rebound in the number of employed persons with a temporary contract (up 4.3 %) and part-time workers (up 1.2 %).

The proportion of people in the EU having participated in many of the most commonly performed internet activities grew at a rapid pace in 2020. As well as a continuation of a gradual well-established upward trend, this may also have reflected the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on people’s internet activities. This pattern was most apparent for the use made of telephoning or video calls, as the share of people performing this activity rose 11 percentage points between 2019 and 2020. In a similar vein, given the widespread use of remote learning for schools, tertiary education and training during 2020, it is unsurprising that the share of the EU population using online learning material also increased.

The overall inflation rate in the EU was 2.9 % in 2021 when compared with 2020; this was almost three times as high as the average rate of change recorded between 2015 and 2020. Transport prices rose at a considerably faster pace in 2021 (up 6.8 %) than they had on average between 2015 and 2020 (an annual rate of change of 0.3 %). A similar pattern was apparent for the price of housing, water and energy and of household equipment.

The COVID-19 crisis impacted not only on overall economic activity, but also on household consumption patterns across the EU. The share of expenditure on several categories commonly related to eating and living at home increased between January 2020 and January 2021. The counterbalance was a lower share of expenditure for activities outside the home, most notably falls of 2.4 points for restaurants and hotels, and 1.7 points for transport; there was also a 0.8 points fall for recreation and culture.

Tourism has also been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. Focusing on the main summer months of June to September, the number of nights spent in tourist accommodation in the EU was 876 million in 2020, compared with 1 529 million the previous year. In other words, demand for tourist accommodation in 2020 was down 42.7 % compared with 2019.

The COVID-19 crisis had a considerable impact on air passenger transport. While the number of passengers carried in January and February 2020 were broadly in line with the equivalent numbers for the same months of 2019, figures were much lower for all subsequent months of 2020 and this pattern continued into 2021, although there were signs of a partial recovery in summer 2021.

More up-to-date information on a wide range of socioeconomic issues can be found in Statistics Explained, a portal that forms part of Eurostat's official website, presenting statistical topics in an easily understandable way.