



Living under a shadow: Is Europe on the brink of a mental health crisis?

- Self-assessed stress-levels surge from 25 to 37 percent
- People under 25 are struggling more than other age groups
- Number of Europeans with experience of burnout increases to 59 percent
- More than 1 in 3 Europeans have trouble sleeping through the night

The mental health of many Europeans has undeniably suffered during the Covid pandemic. Last year, one in four said that their stress level had increased significantly since the outbreak of the virus – a trend that has continued over the past 12 months. It would nonetheless be an error to ascribe these developments solely to the pandemic, as the mental health of the European population was not all that stellar to begin with: even before Covid hit, the self-reported rate of those having suffered from burnout, often feeling like they are on the verge of it or at least being familiar with the feeling has always exceeded 50 percent. Today, the European average has reached an all-time high of almost 60 percent. In many regards, Covid seems to have merely exacerbated mental health problems which have loomed over (and, pun intended, inside of) our heads for years.

Self-assessed burnout rate at all-time high, Eastern Europeans especially susceptible

Though three in five Europeans (59 percent) claim their mental health has remained largely unchanged throughout the past two years, self-assessed burnout levels have never been higher. The number of people who have either experienced feelings of burnout at least once in their lifetime, often feel like they are at the verge of burning out or have actually suffered a burnout is now at 59 percent – an increase by 5 percentage points compared to last year. This prevalence is particularly high towards the east of the continent. In Poland, 70 percent feel they are at least at risk of potentially suffering from burnout at some point, followed by first-time participants Kazakhstan (68 percent) and Romania (67 percent).

More than a fifth of adults in the Netherlands (22 percent), as well as around a fifth of people in Serbia (20 percent) and in Belgium (19 percent) report having already experienced a burnout; by contrast, this applies to less than one in 10 Italians (9 percent). But around one in four Italians (24 percent) – the same proportion as in Romania, and just behind the 26 percent in Poland – feel that they are on the verge of a burnout. Austrians (13 percent) and Swiss (12 percent) fell least at risk of burning out in the near future.

People in France (17 percent) and Germany (18 percent) are the most confident that burnout will never become an issue for them in the future.

Across Europe, women (65 percent) are significantly more at risk of burning out than men (53 percent). People under 25 (68 percent) and young professionals between the ages of 25 to 34 (72 percent) feel considerably more vulnerable than all other age groups – among people over the age of 55, burnout potential is much lower (22 percent). Indeed, around a quarter (24 percent) of all respondents aged under 35 believe that they are on the verge of a burnout. Perhaps unsurprisingly, feelings of having experienced a burnout, or of being about to experience one, are substantially higher among those who report that they are struggling financially than among the financially comfortable.



59%
of Europeans say they have felt like being on the verge of burnout at least once.

Decline in overall mental well-being particularly prevalent among Southern European population

Regardless of countries having lifted many Covid-related restrictions earlier this year, a considerable number of Europeans have reported rising stress levels since the beginning of the pandemic. More than one in three (37 percent) maintain that their stress levels have increased significantly since the first wave of Covid – a surge of 12 percentage points compared to 2021. Considering the aforementioned rate for potential burnout, this comes as no surprise. Southern European countries are exceptionally affected by higher levels of stress, with more than half of Italians (53 percent) and close to half of the Portuguese population (47 percent) affected. On the other hand, 12 percent of people in the UK say their stress levels have improved during the pandemic, although for a third of them (32 percent) Covid-19 has brought more stress. The countries least troubled by this trend are the Netherlands (24 percent), Germany (27 percent), as well as France and Switzerland (28 percent each).

Generally speaking, women (43 percent) have felt more stressed than men (30 percent), while those identifying as another gender are especially subject to increased stress (48 percent). Age-wise, people under 25 are the ones who have felt most under pressure (46 percent).

With a rise in stress levels comes an increasing number of Europeans who are struggling with their sleep: more than one in three (35 percent) complain about poor quality of sleep – an increase by 20 percent compared to 2021, where respondents were asked whether they had been struggling with their sleep. Among those with the poorest self-reported quality of sleep are respondents from the UK, France (43 percent each) and Spain (42 percent). By contrast, barely one in four people in the Netherlands (27 percent) report having poor quality of sleep.

As far as their general mental health goes, about one in three Europeans (29 percent) have reported a decline since the pandemic started around two years ago: people in Austria (37 percent), Italy and Portugal (both 35 percent) have been particularly afflicted. The same applies to women (35 percent) in comparison to men (23 percent) and, again, people under 25 (41 percent). Respondents in Switzerland (64 percent) and the Netherlands (63 percent) were least likely to notice changes in their mental well-being. Romania is an interesting case: while a majority (65 percent) reported no recognisable changes in their overall mental health, Romanians simultaneously come in third in terms of increased levels of stress (46 percent).

When asked to assess their own mental health, fewer than two in five adults in Kazakhstan (39 percent) describe it as 'good'; the same applies to just under a half of people in the Czech Republic and Spain (both 48 percent). Accordingly, 16 percent of people in these two countries described having 'poor' mental health, behind only adults in the UK (17 percent). Across Europe, almost one in five adults aged 18 to 24 (19 percent) said they suffered from poor mental health – compared to just 4 percent of people aged 70 and older.

Youth and women most likely to confide in friends or family for mental health

As overall mental health deteriorates, advice and trust become more important. Europeans are most likely to turn to their GP for mental health problems (40 percent). They share this special status with "psychologists/psychiatrists" and "a significant other" (40 percent each). Still, in terms of who would talk to who first, there are significant differences between age groups and genders:

Women are most likely to open up to a close friend or family member (44 percent), followed by a psychiatrist or psychologist (42 percent), and their partner (38 percent). Men, on the other hand, prefer confiding in their GP (43 percent), followed by a partner (43 percent), and are generally less likely to speak with a mental health professional (37 percent) than women. Young Europeans present similarly to women: Almost 1 in 2 aged 18-34 would first turn to friends or family (46 percent), then to a mental health professional or their partner (43 percent each). Overall, over 1 in 10 (12 percent) would choose not to bring up their mental health struggles with anyone.

Food, sleep and exercise – the weapons of choice against increased levels of stress

Acknowledgement is key when it comes to tackling mental health problems – but what exactly are Europeans doing to address them? To cope with increased levels of stress, one in two (53 percent) do their best to maintain a healthy diet and 42 percent try to adhere to a sleeping routine. About one in three (32 percent) channel their excess energy into intense physical activity. Such physical outlets are especially popular in Spain (48 percent), Portugal (46 percent) and Romania (44 percent). The use of nutritional supplements to boost overall mood comes in handy for 31 percent, with Eastern European citizens turning to them most frequently: the Czech Republic, Serbia (40 percent each) and Romania (41 percent) are their most dedicated advocates. Holistic activities such as yoga and Pilates (24 percent) are very popular in Poland (45 percent), and more so across the continent among women (29 percent) than men (18 percent). Just over one in five Europeans (22 percent) rely on prescription medicines to promote their psychological health. On their quest for inner equilibrium, 20 percent meditate regularly. Generally speaking, women look after their mental health more than men, with 90 percent pursuing at least one specific activity to improve their well-being. This trend also extends to the younger age groups of under 35-year-olds, where physical activity is more popular compared to other ages.

37%

of Europeans report significantly higher levels of stress compared to pre-Covid times.

29%

have observed a decline in their overall mental health over the past two years.

