

THE COVID-19 SURVEY 2020

*How the international community in the Amsterdam Area
is dealing with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic*

This survey took place during in November/December 2020

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Highlights	7
3. The respondents	9
4. Attitudes to coronavirus	15
5. The government response	17
6. Information needs	21
7. The CoronaMelder app	24
8. Coronavirus and mental health	26
9. Leaving the Netherlands	31
10. Financial impact	34
11. Working from home	43
12. Comparing AMA* with the rest of the Netherlands	45
13. A brief look at the experience of new arrivals	50
14. Concluding remarks	51

**Amsterdam Metropolitan Area*

Introduction

ICAP Amsterdam was founded to build a bridge between the city's international community and government and civic organisations. In particular, ICAP has established an independent forum which represents and reflects the views of the international community on issues which have an impact on the attractiveness of the Amsterdam Area as a place to live in and to do business.

In November 2020, IN Amsterdam commissioned ICAP to carry out a survey to assess the way the international community is coping with the Covid-19 pandemic.

In particular, the survey looked at the impact of coronavirus on jobs and income, mental health and future plans.

Note: All the graphs in this report refer to Amsterdam Metropolitan Area (AMA) respondents only, unless stated otherwise.

In the press

Is Covid-19 the end of the expat world as we know it?

‘No, expats are not leaving, but coronavirus has made it harder to move here’

Amsterdam, wereldstad op zijn retour

Baan kwijt, maar terug gaan
naar huis kan niet

Zo ervaren expats Nederland in coronatijd

Methodology

The research was commissioned to find out more about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area's international community.

To this end, we approached dozens of groups, websites and other organisations with strong links to the international community and asked them to circulate the survey's website link.*

A number of organisations were approached personally by ICAP board members.

The survey was online for one month in late November, early December, to incorporate as many monthly newsletter schedules as well.

It was also circulated to the ICAP mailing list of over 2,700 people, who were also sent a reminder after two weeks.

*A full list is available on request

Methodology continued

Respondents

- In total, 2,376 people took part in the survey, 1,054 of whom lived in the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area as a whole.
- The survey looked at the AMA respondents in general and carried out some comparisons between AMA respondents and the rest of the Netherlands, to assess if there were any main differences.
- Note: The demographic make-up of the respondents reflects earlier surveys but may not be representative of the international community as a whole in terms of age, nationality, income, duration of stay etc.

Questionnaire

- The survey was based on multiple choice, sliding scale and open questions.
- The questions were drawn up by ICAP, with input from IN Amsterdam, and were based on specific requests for information from IN Amsterdam.

Highlights: Amsterdam Metropolitan Area

Almost a quarter of AMA residents said they had considered leaving the Netherlands because of coronavirus. Being with family in their home country was the main reason to want to leave.

58% said they were not aware of any international workers who had left the Netherlands because of coronavirus, 27% were aware of 'one or two'.

Just 14% say coronavirus is **not having** an impact on their mental health – this is in line with the national average.

70% of AMA respondents are worried about the impact of coronavirus on their household income, compared with 60% of respondents living elsewhere in the Netherlands.

Coronavirus has already had an impact on the household income of 40% of respondents. Of them, around 26% had lost at least 50% of their household income.

51% wanted the government and other organisations to provide more support via information and events. Travel was the most important topic requiring better information.

The respondents

In this section, we look at the demographics of the survey respondents.

Who took part?

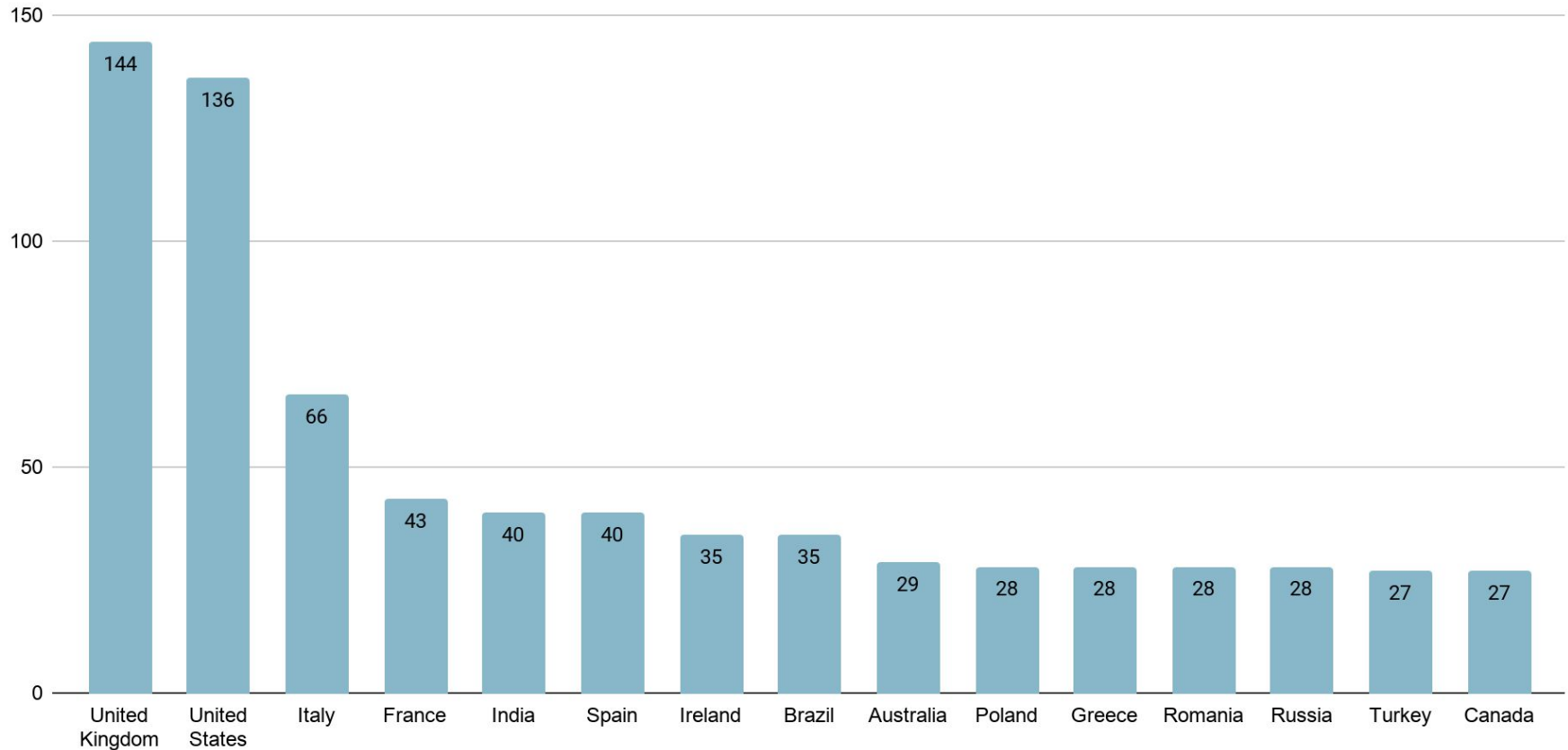
2,376 people completed the questionnaire, of whom 779 lived in Amsterdam. A further 275 lived in the wider Amsterdam region, taking the total AMA residents to 1,054

Of the AMA respondents:

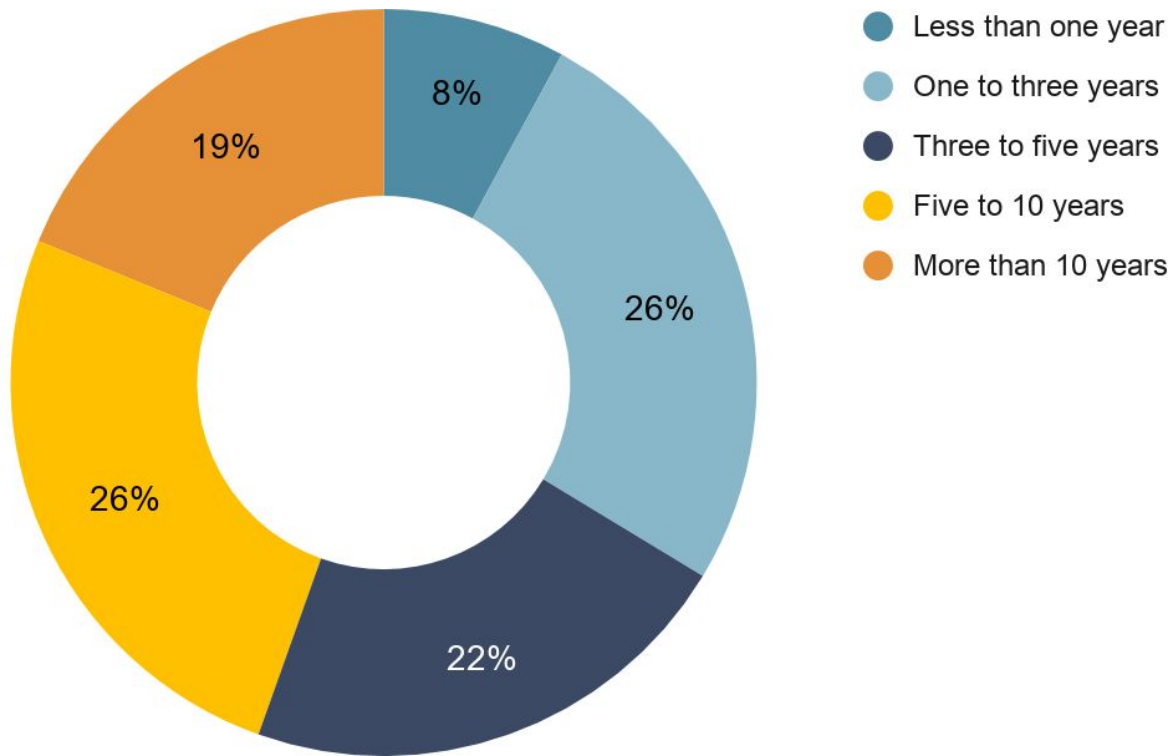
- 44% live with a partner, 26% with a partner and children and 19% live alone
- 20% had a household income of less than €3,000 gross a month and 22% have a household income of more than €8,000 gross per month
- 111 live in Haarlem, 57 in Amstelveen, 38, in Almere, 34 in Hilversum and 24 in Hoofddorp. The rest lived in Zaandam, Zaanstad, Lelystad and Purmerend
- 53% are from the EU, 24% have a five year or permanent residency permit, 11% have a highly-skilled migrants permit
- In total 105 different nationalities took part in the survey

Where are you from?

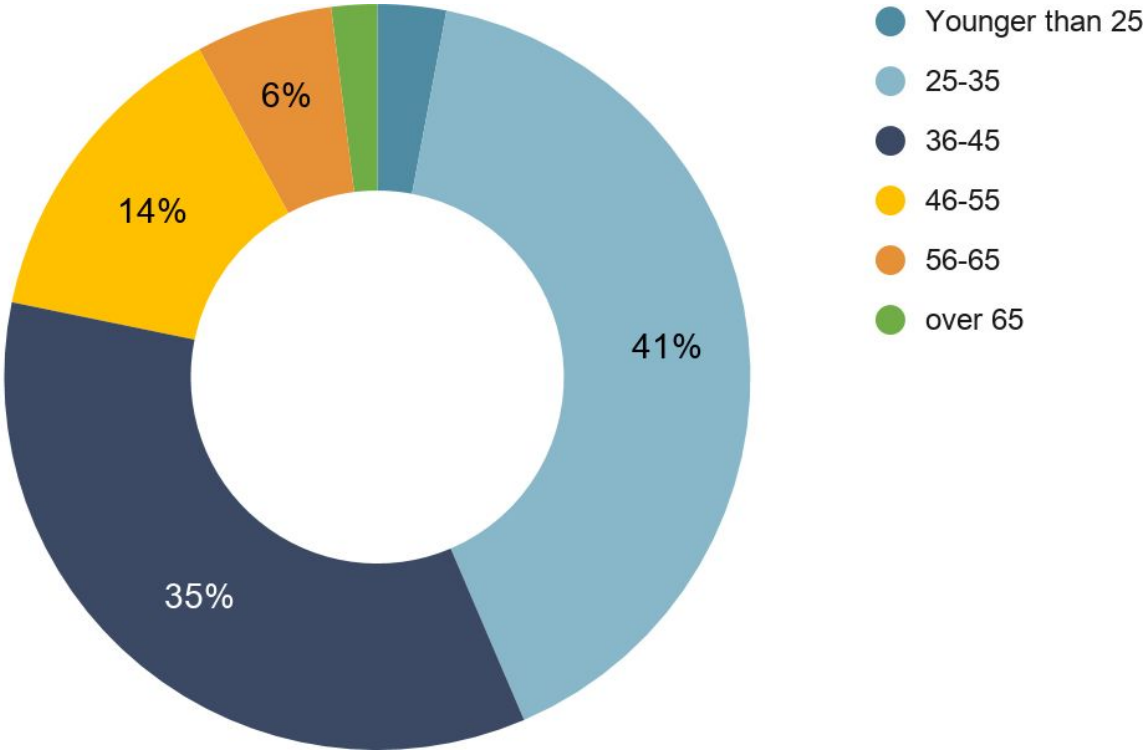
In total, people with 105 different nationalities took part in the survey. AMA respondents came from 80 different countries.



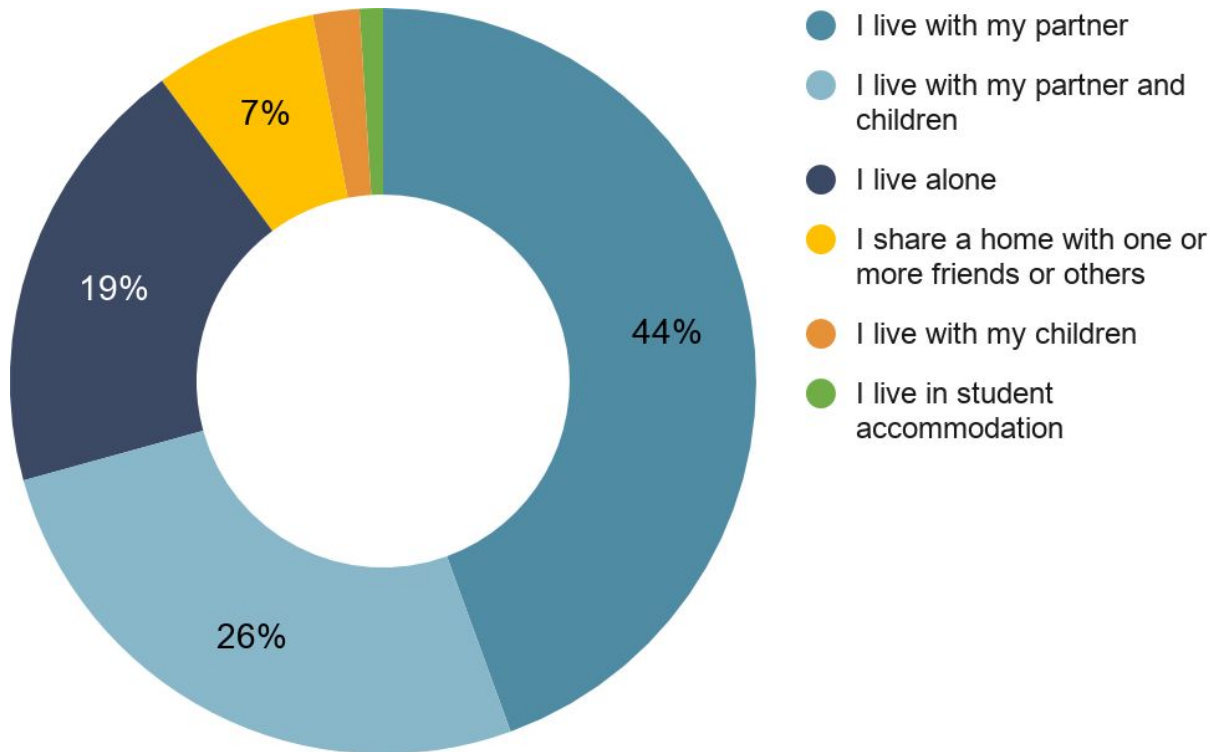
How long have you lived in the Netherlands?



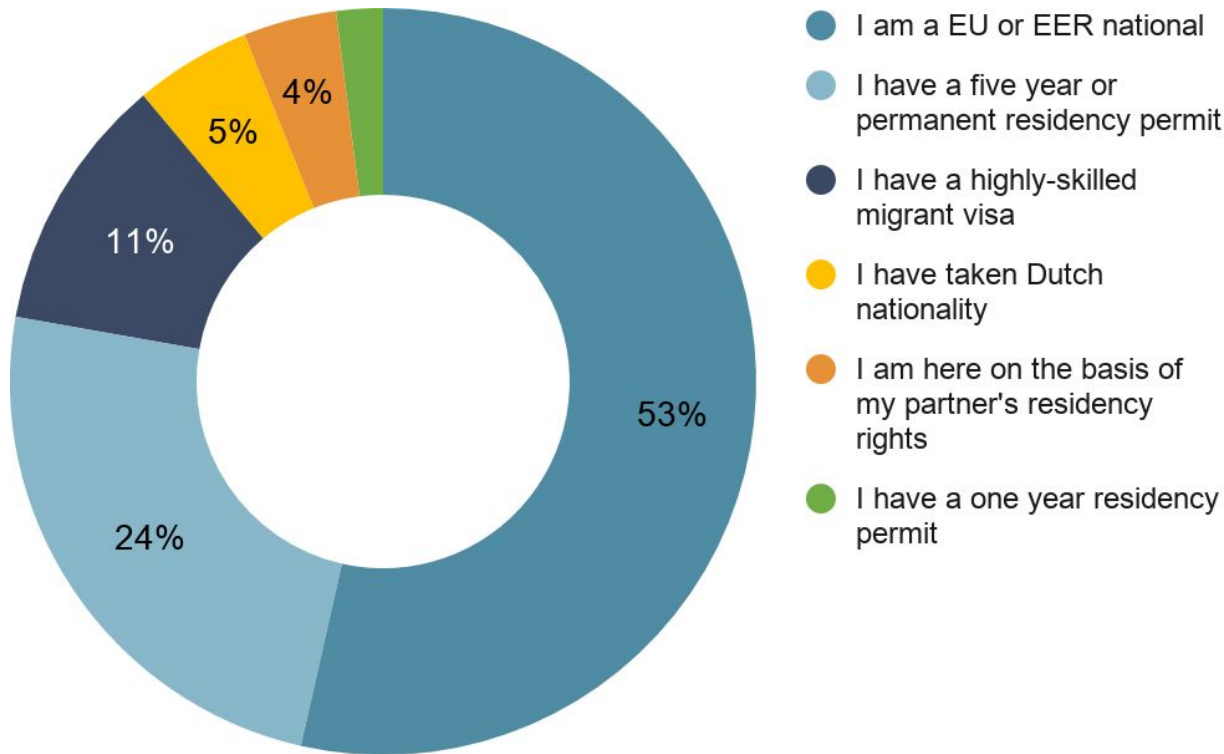
How old are you?



What is your household set-up?



What is your residency status?



Note: Just five AMA respondents were on a zoekjaar permit and three had a start-up visa

Attitudes to Covid-19

In this section, we look at general attitudes to coronavirus within the AMA international community

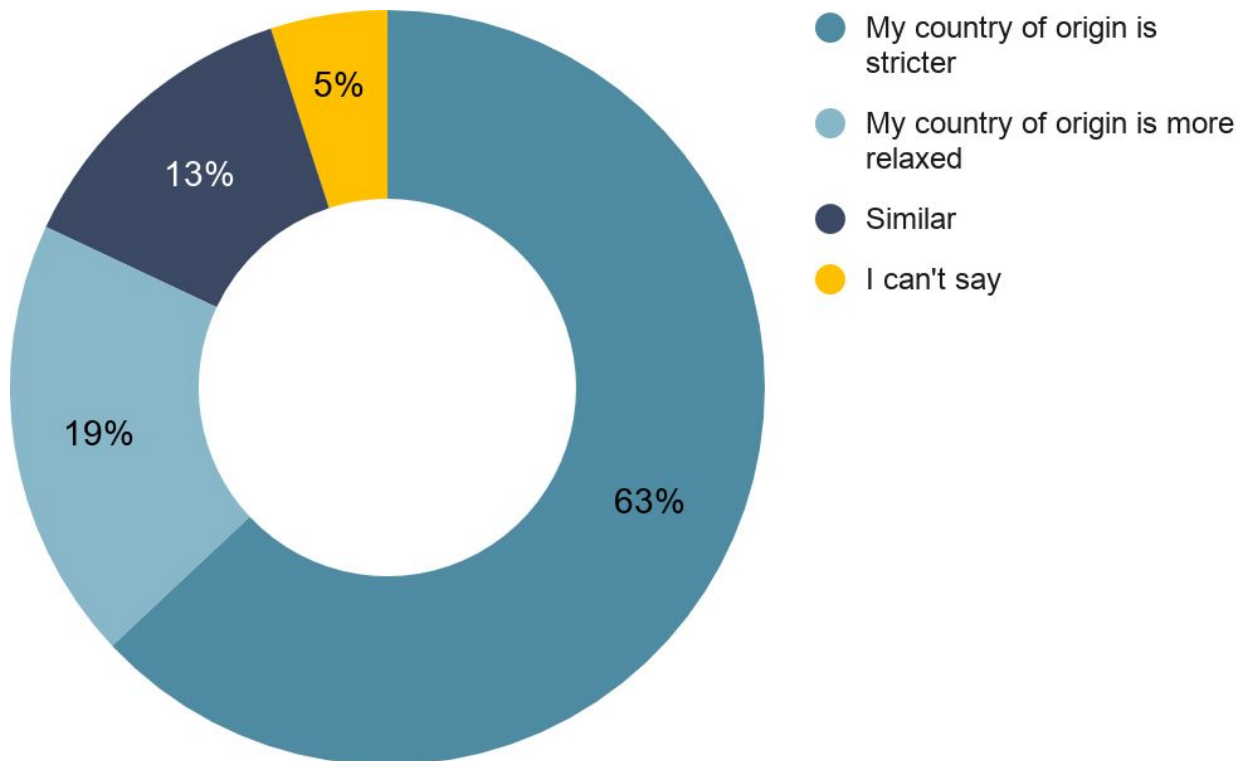
Key findings

- 63% said their country of origin is stricter in its approach to coronavirus than the Netherlands
- 51% said the Dutch government should be stricter in its approach than it currently is
- 43% said they had some or a lot of confidence in the Dutch government's handling of the second wave, but this is down from 48% during the first wave
- 44% have downloaded the CoronaMelder app
- In general, 44% say they understand why the government has acted as it has
- 51% would like more official information, with information about travel, including visiting family and friends abroad top of the wish list
- 'Expatriate' news sites were the most common source of information about the pandemic in the Netherlands

The Dutch government's response

Just over half of respondents said they felt the Dutch government should be stricter in its approach to the pandemic

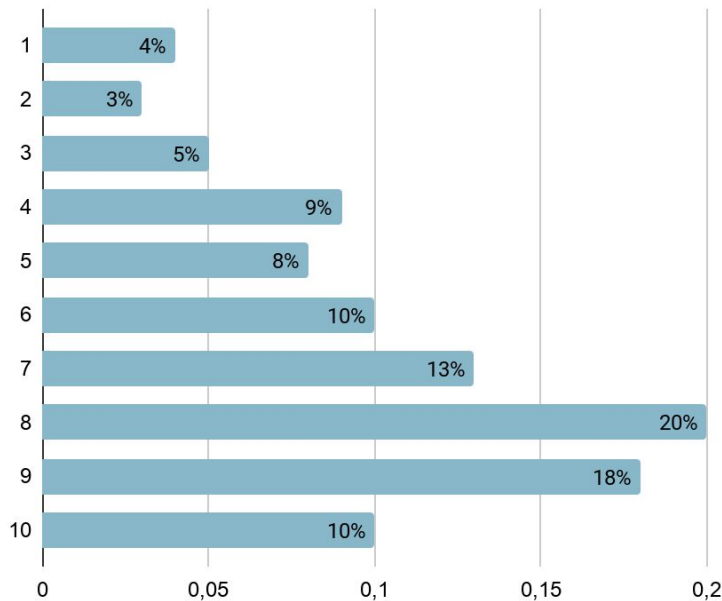
Respondents were asked how the Dutch response compared that in their home country?



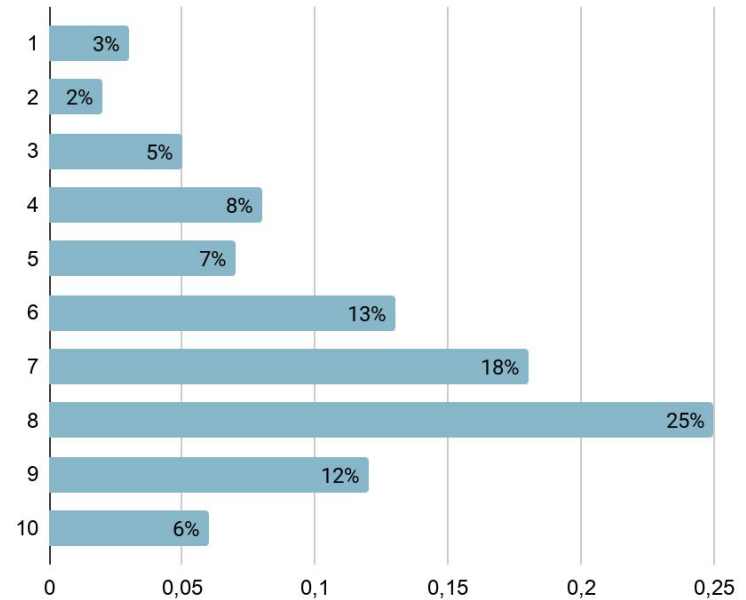
Rating the Dutch government

Respondents were asked how they rate the Dutch government's response at the start of the pandemic and now. *1 = very poor, 10 = very good*

At the start of the pandemic

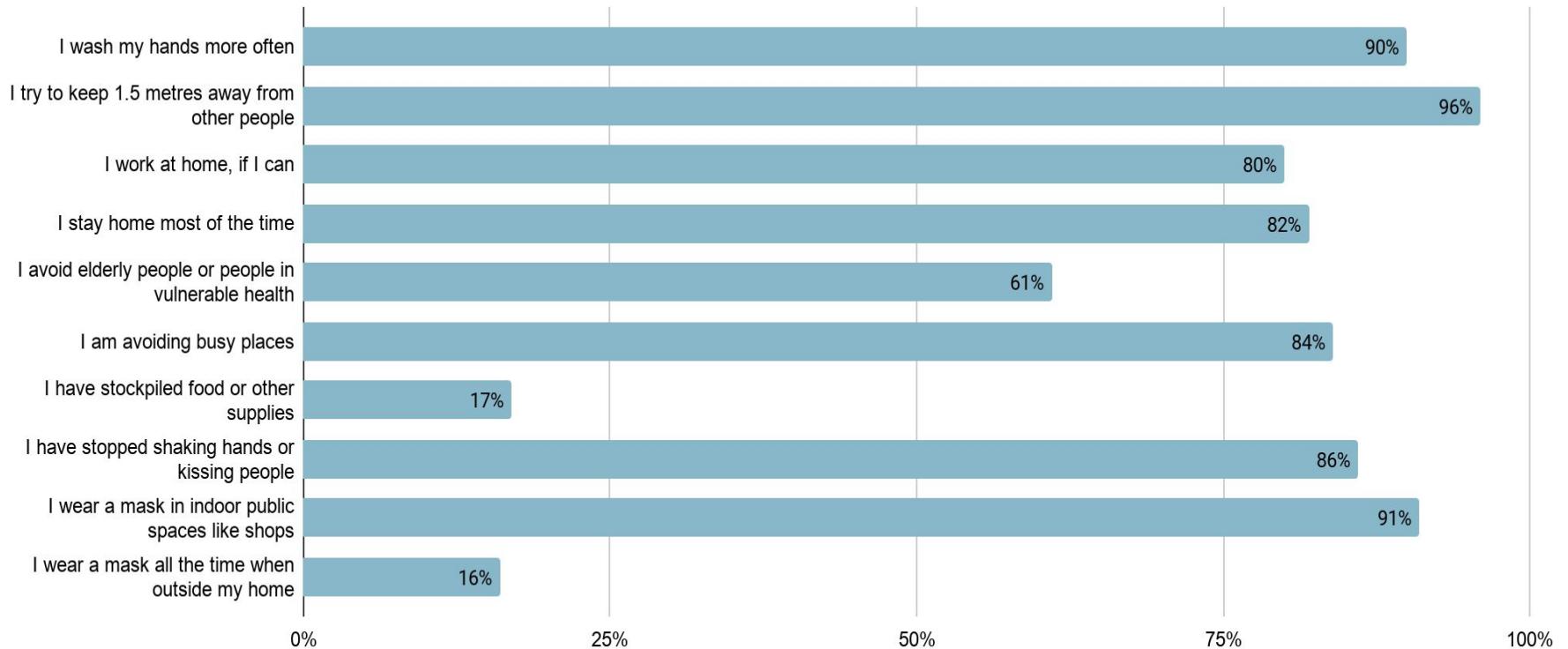


Now



Combating coronavirus

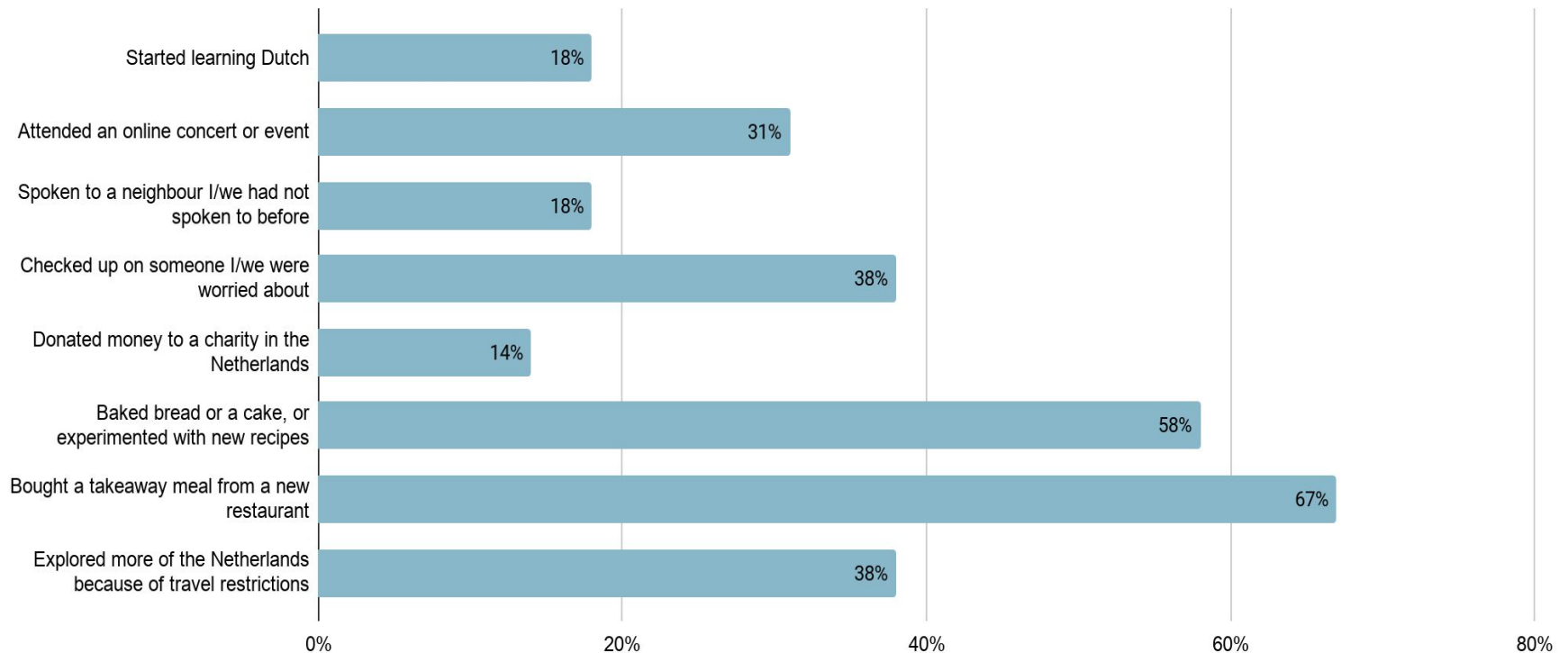
Respondents were asked what they were doing to keep coronavirus at bay*



*Respondents could tick more than one option

Coping strategies

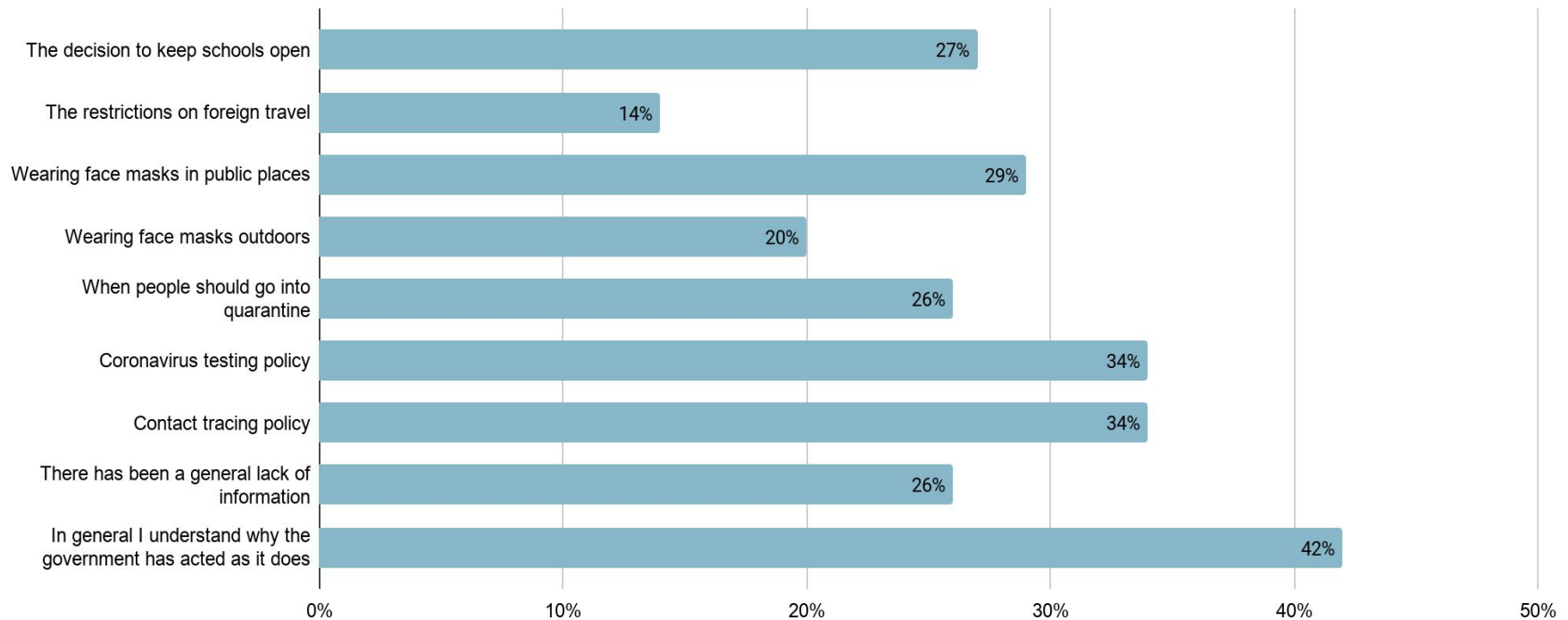
Respondents were asked what else they have been doing since the start of the pandemic*



**Respondents could tick more than one option*

Does the Dutch strategy make sense?

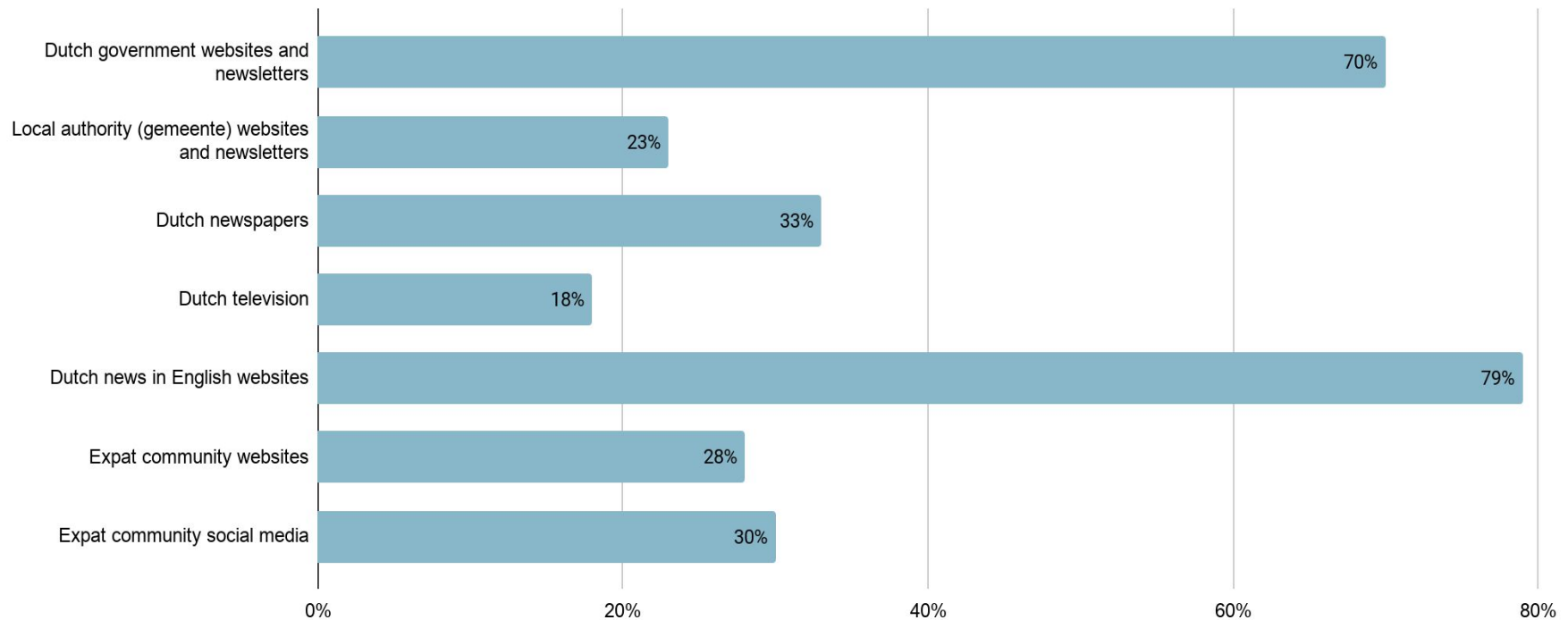
Respondents were asked what aspects of the Dutch government's approach to coronavirus they found it hardest to understand*



**Respondents could tick more than one option*

Where do you get your information?

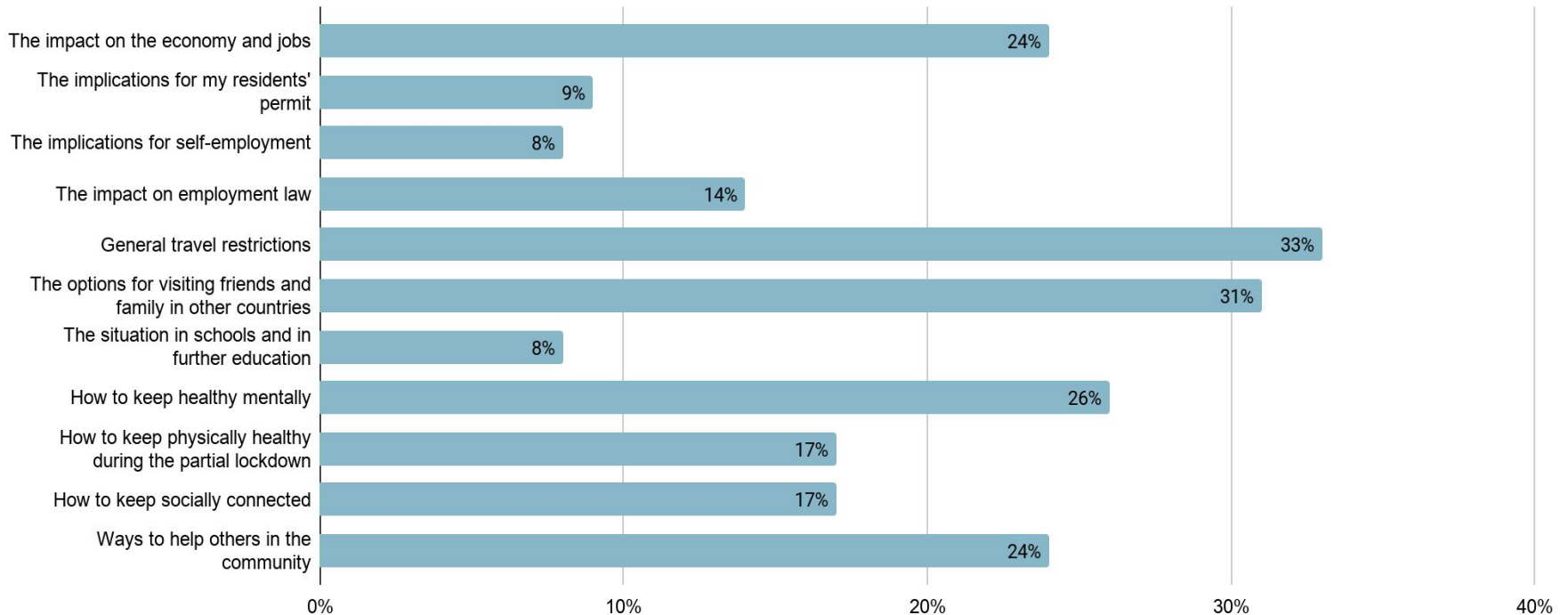
Respondents were asked about the main sources of information they used to find out about coronavirus in the Netherlands*



**Respondents could tick more than one option*

More information?

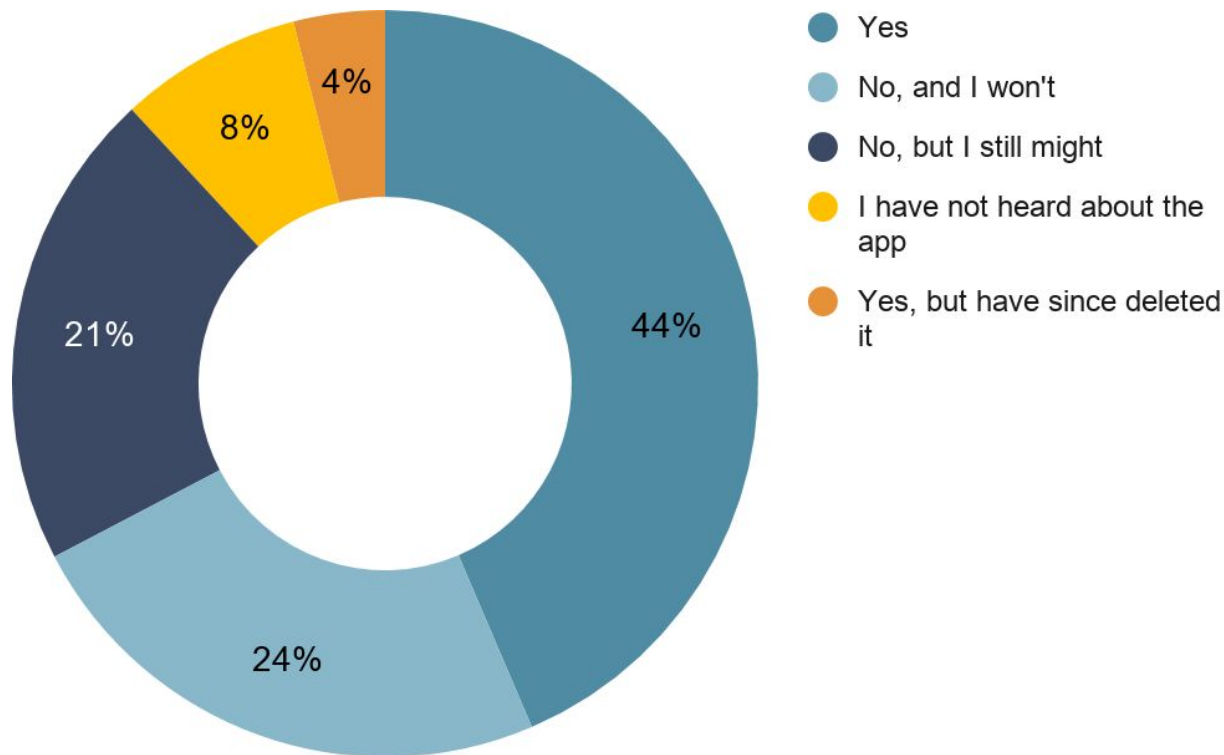
50% of the AMA respondents said they would like more information and help from official sources. Information about travel topped the list*



**Respondents could tick more than one option*

The CoronaMelder app

Respondents were asked if they were using the government's official CoronaMelder app to help track and trace potential coronavirus cases



Respondents on the Dutch approach to the pandemic

‘Handling pandemic is hard and unprecedented in our lifetime, it is unfair to expect flawless decisions from government. One thing I’d like to know better is how I can help others best in these hard times.’

‘The government strategy is not clear. Knowing when press briefings are and understanding them isn't always straight forward.’

‘Before the coronavirus I was very happy with the Netherlands, but the pandemic has exposed how selfish and stubborn the Dutch mentality is. Personal freedom should not come before someone else's life.’

‘I’d rather be here with this sane country than in the US, no question. In general I’m very proud of this government, and I trust them.’

‘My home country provides all government information in 62 languages.’

Coronavirus and mental health

In this section, we look at the impact of coronavirus on
AMA respondents' mental health

Key findings

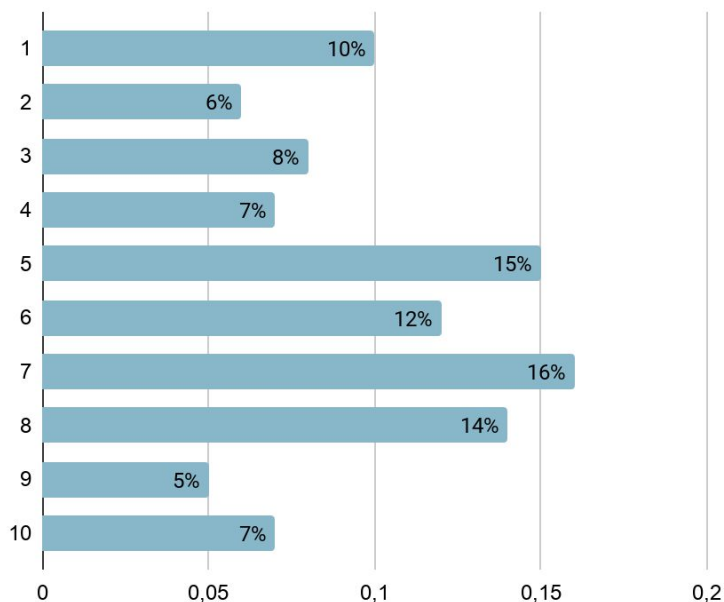
- 7% of respondents were extremely worried about the impact on coronavirus on friends and family in the Netherlands, but 26% were extremely worried about the impact on friends and family abroad
- Of the 301 AMA respondents with children, parents were most worried that their offspring may pick up coronavirus at school
- 77% of AMA respondents said coronavirus is having an impact on their mental health
- Only 2% of respondents who are struggling with mental health issues had been helped by their employer
- Almost a quarter of AMA respondents had considered leaving the Netherlands and 42% were aware of at least one other person or family who had done so

Who are you worried about?

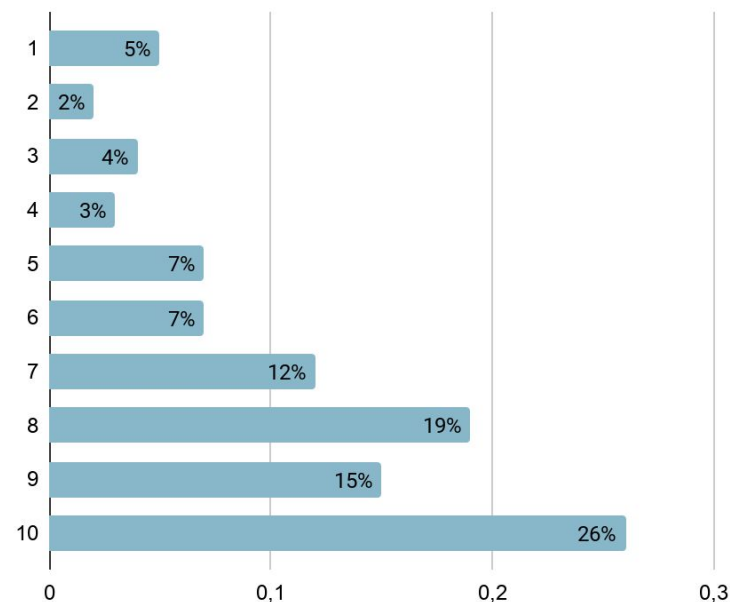
Respondents were asked if they were worried about friends and family both in the Netherlands and in their country of origin

1 = not at all worried, 10 = very worried

In the Netherlands

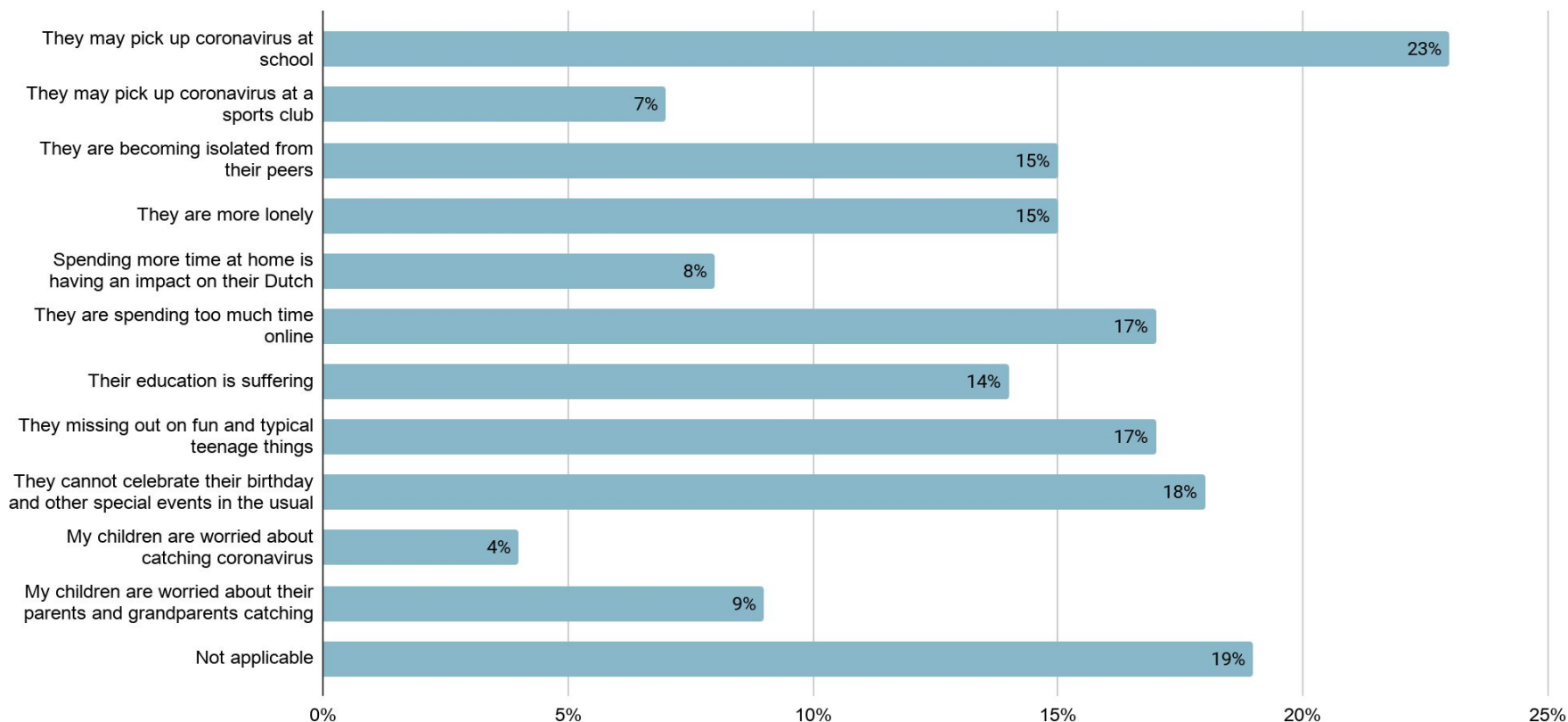


In your home country



Children and coronavirus

301 AMA respondents had children who gave rise to their own, specific concerns. Parents were asked what worried them*

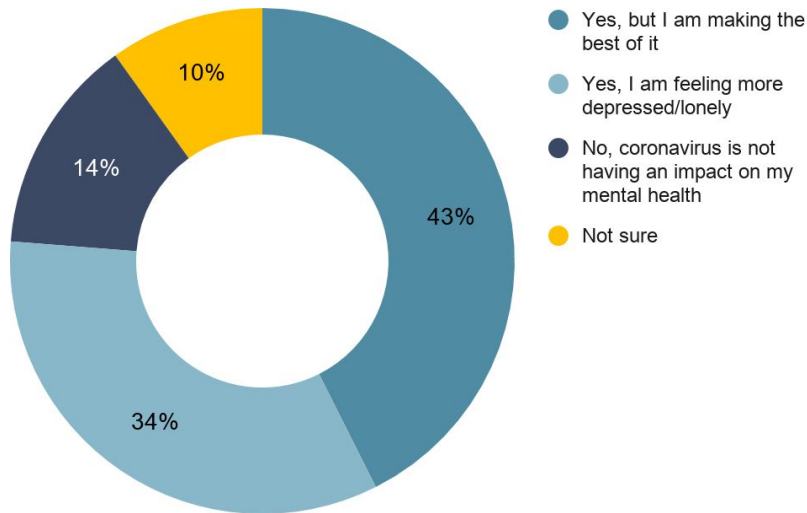


*Respondents could tick more than one option

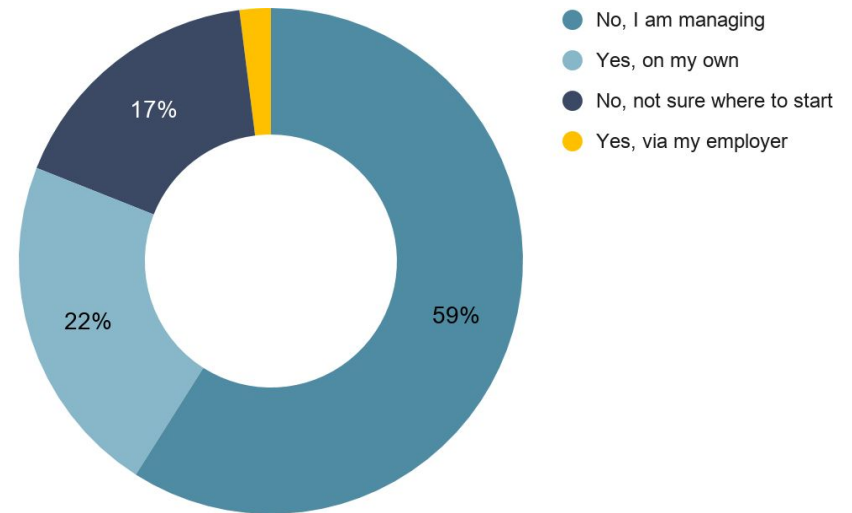
Coronavirus and mental health

Respondents were asked if Covid-19 was having an impact on their mental health and, if so, how they are tackling the issue

Is coronavirus having an impact on your mental health?

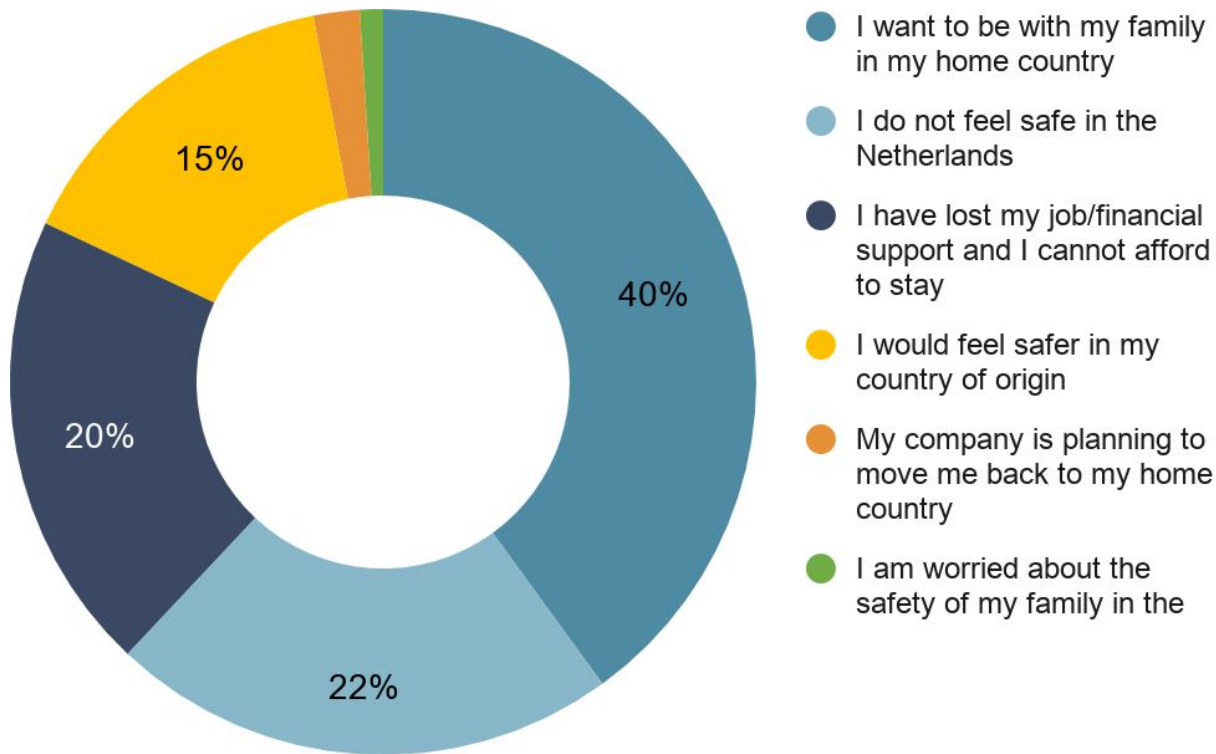


Have you sought help for your mental health?



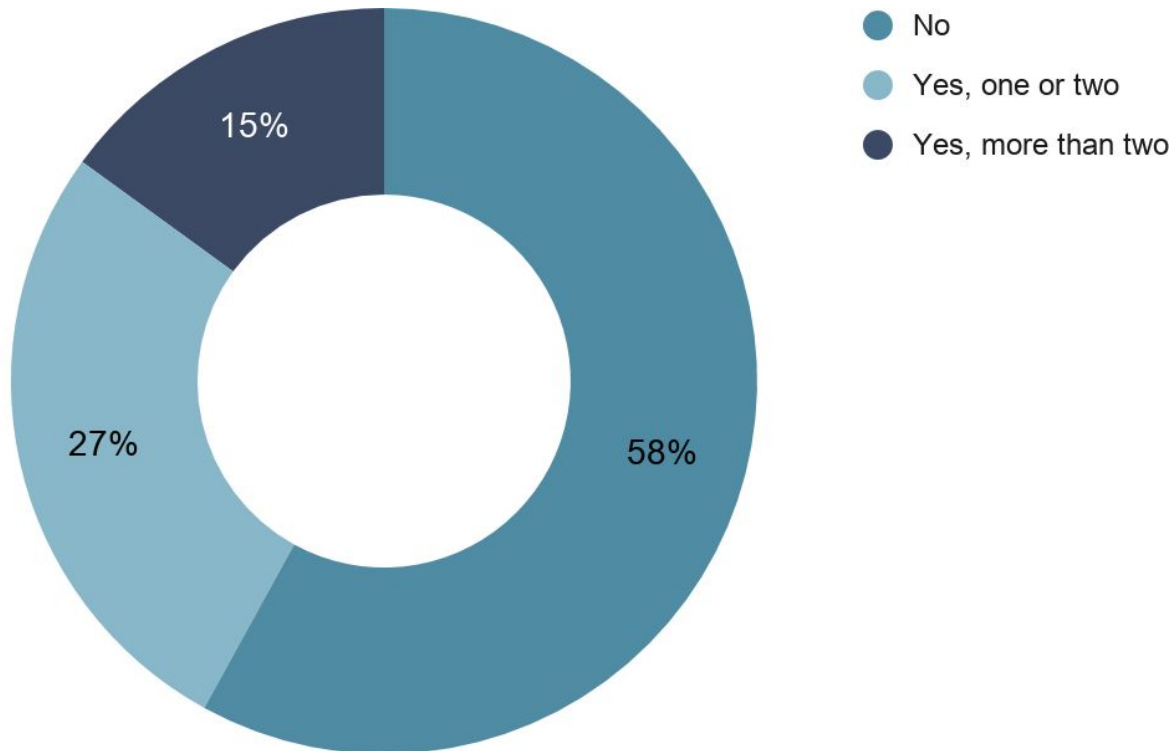
Leaving the Netherlands?

Almost 25% of AMA residents said they had considered leaving the Netherlands. These are the main reasons:



Leaving the Netherlands?

Dutch newspapers have carried many articles about 'expats' leaving, based largely on anecdotal evidence. The respondents were asked if they were aware of people who had left NL because of coronavirus



Respondents were asked about the impact on their mental health

'Isolating, numbing, but also made my day feel longer.'

'We feel lonely.. we miss our family abroad (we have not seen them for the last 1.5+ years)..I hope the vaccine comes out soon and we can get back to normal..we have no economical worries etc. but I know a lot of people also suffering from that part and it is sad to see that.. I hope this will be over soon.'

'The loneliness has been very difficult to cope with. Especially as we have only been here a year and have not had the chance to socialize and meet new people.'

'The uncertainty of when I can even play outdoor team sports, let alone go back to the office, is not helping my mental health. It would be nice to have something to aim for, as a community/nation.'

'For a whole year my kids have not seen their grandparents. It is heartbreaking that they find it normal to kiss a phone when they talk to family. If we are at parks they run up to old people to say hi to them.'

The financial impact of Covid-19

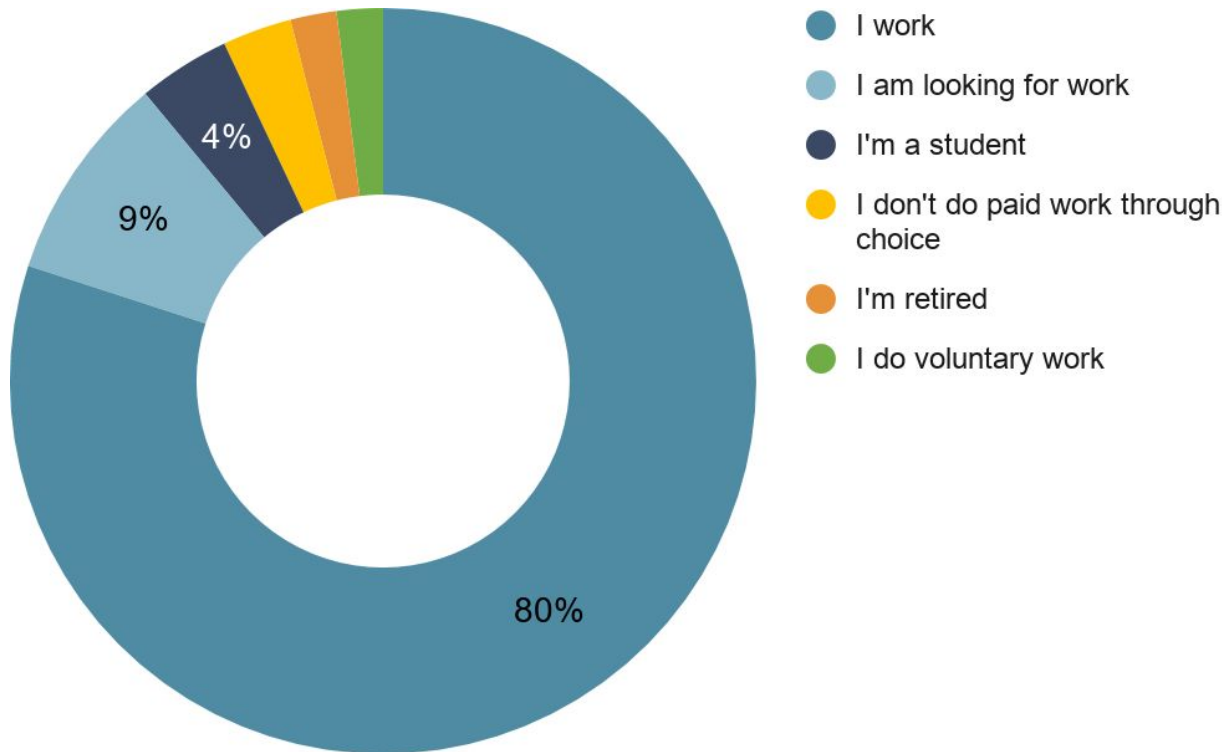
What impact is coronavirus having on international workers' income and jobs?

Key findings

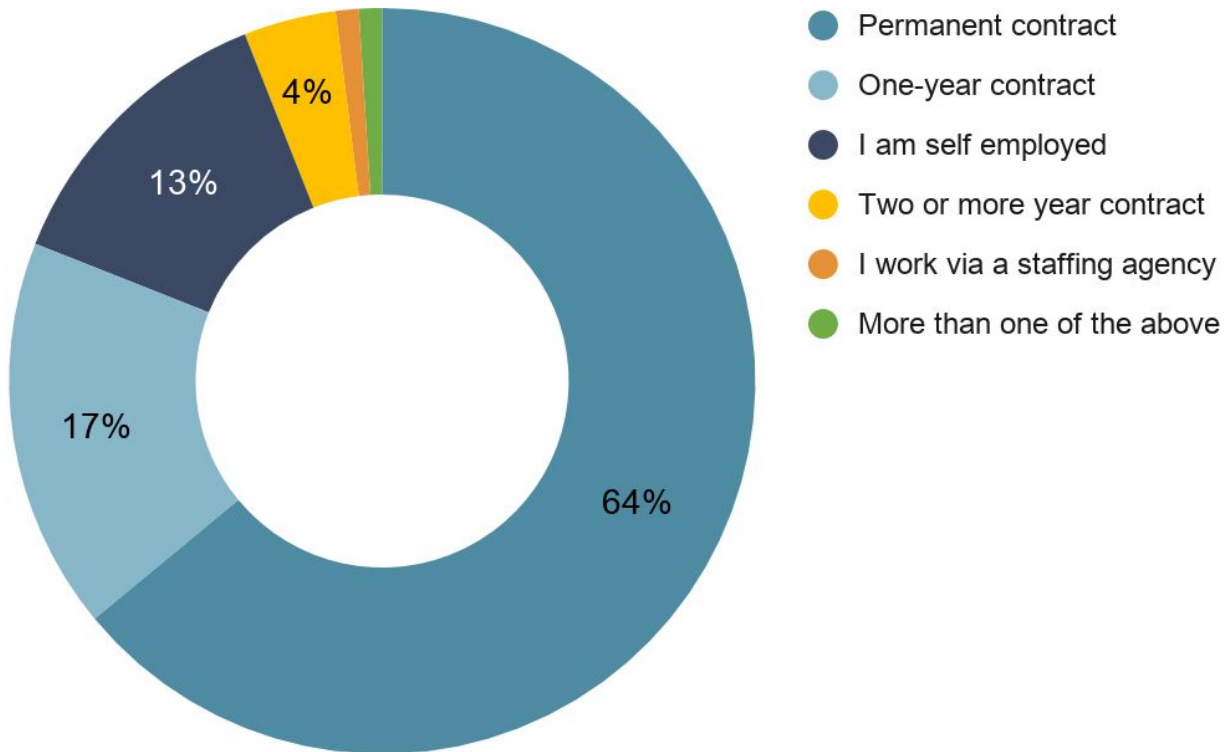
- 70% of AMA respondents are worried about the impact of coronavirus on their household income
- 40% say coronavirus has already had an impact on their household income, and 26% have lost at least 50%
- Almost half say the sector they work in has been hard hit
- 27% are concerned their contract may not be renewed and 11% have already lost their job
- 64% of AMA respondents have a permanent contract
- 17% work in IT, followed by finance (5%) and advertising/media (4%)
- Just 9% would like to work remotely in the Netherlands from their home country once the pandemic is over

What do the respondents do?

Most AMA respondents are in paid work, spread across 20 professional areas, dominated by IT

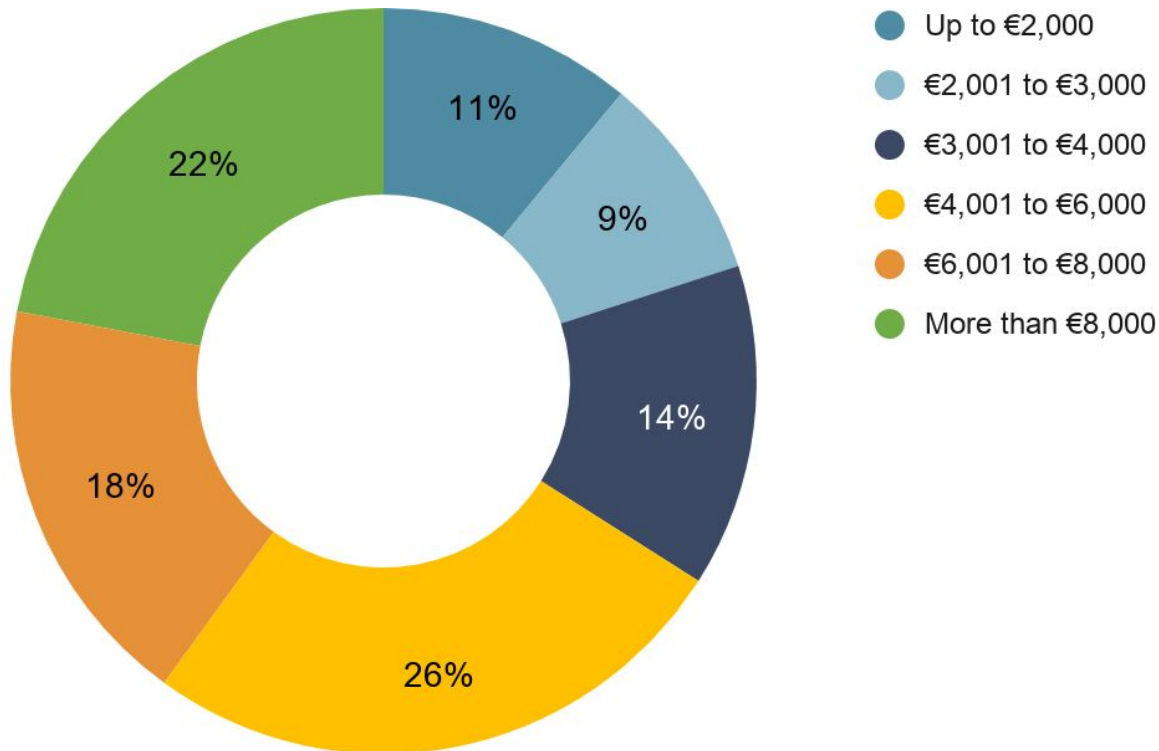


What sort of contract do AMA's international workers have?



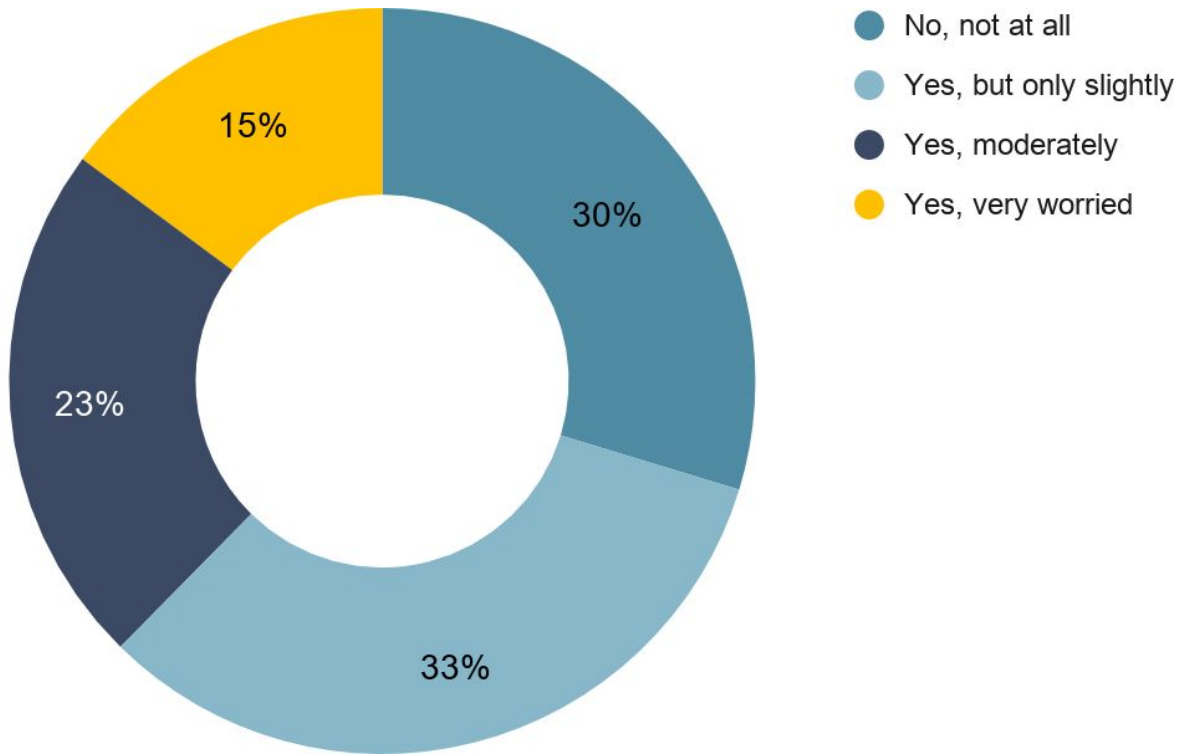
Household income

Respondents were asked what their gross monthly household income was. Just over two in five AMA respondents were the sole earner in their household.



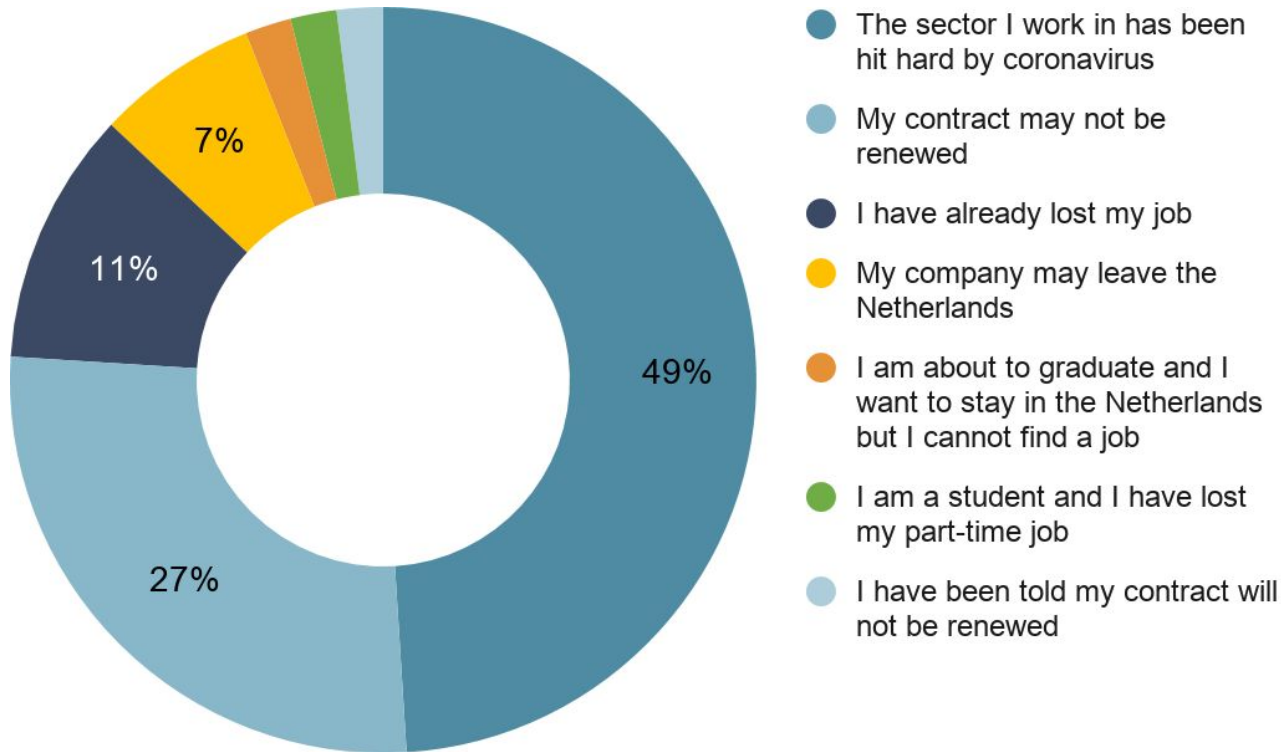
Financial worries

Respondents were asked if they were worried about the impact of coronavirus on their household income



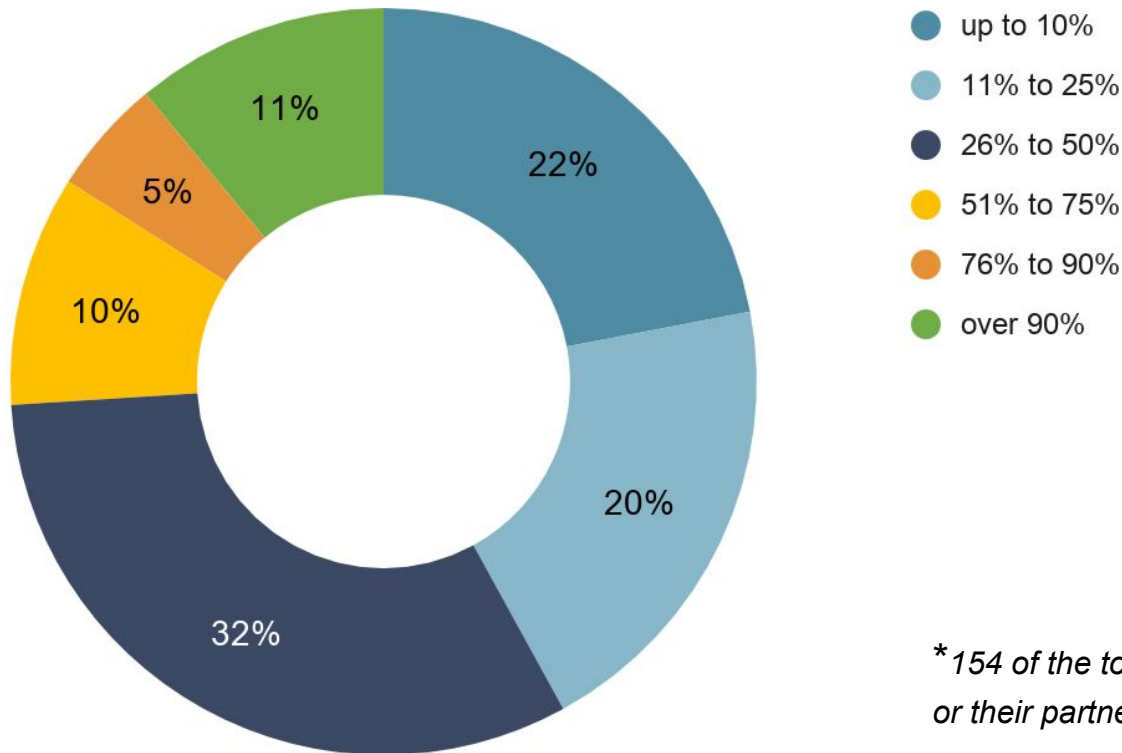
Financial worries

AMA respondents have a variety of reasons for being worried about the impact of coronavirus on their household income



Financial worries

Two in five AMA respondents said that coronavirus had already had an impact on their household income*. They were asked how much their household had already lost



**154 of the total AMA respondents said either they, or their partner, had already lost their job*

Government support

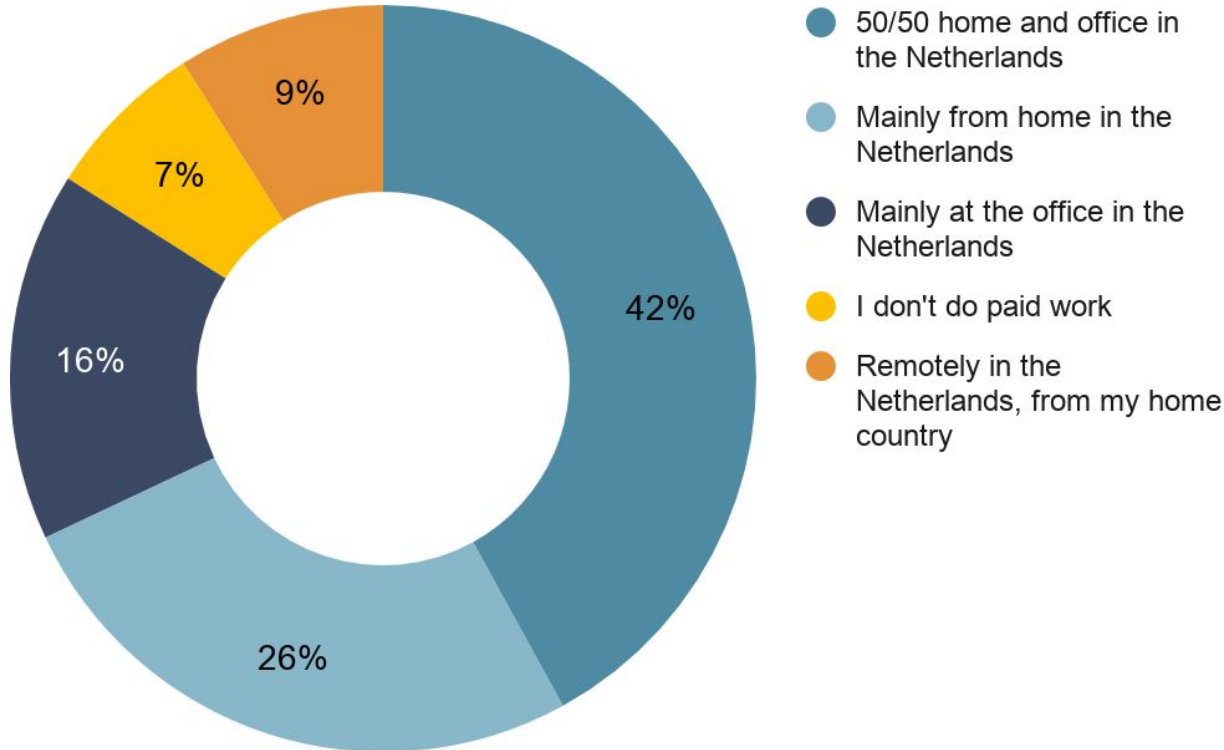
Most AMA respondents (75%) said the various government support schemes were not relevant to their situation and 16% said they were not eligible.

Of the rest:

- 31 respondents had benefited from the TOZO scheme for the self employed
- 7 respondents had successfully claimed help for small firms
- 8 respondents had their claims rejected
- And 40 respondents knew nothing about the government schemes

Working from home

Respondents were asked how they would like to arrange their working life once the pandemic is over and they can return to the office



Covid-19 and work/income

‘Sub-optimal, unergonomic, difficult to focus, no space for dedicated workspace, too much noise.’

‘More like living at work than just “working from home”.’

‘It can be difficult to switch off, and this affects my mood negatively.’

‘My job was over 50% international travel, which is completely eliminated since March. So I am feeling bored and rudderless.’

‘I like the freedom to organize my own time, but I miss some contact with my colleagues.’

‘Hard when kids are at home.’

‘Applying for social assistance, and it being handed out based on the income of my partner (meaning I am not eligible) is some 1960’s Stepford wife garbage. We are two separate humans but the gemeente presumes he can bankroll my life.’

Comparing AMA with the rest of the Netherlands

Is the situation in the AMA different to the rest of the country?

Key points

There is little statistical difference between AMA respondents and those in the rest of the country apart from in a few key areas

In particular, there is little difference between the impact of coronavirus on the mental health of respondents, or on their fears for friends, family and children

AMA residents are, however, more likely to be worried about the impact of coronavirus on their household income than internationals in the rest of the country

49% of AMA respondents said the sector they worked in had been hard hit by coronavirus, compared with 42% elsewhere, and 43% in The Hague

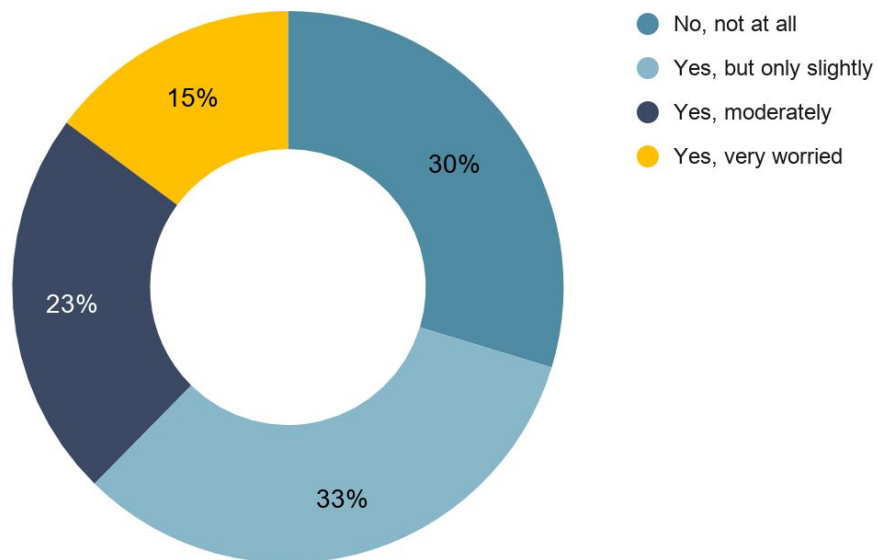
40% of AMA said coronavirus had already had an impact on their income, compared with 36% in the rest of the country

Respondents who had already lost income, were more out of pocket if they lived in AMA rather than in the rest of the country

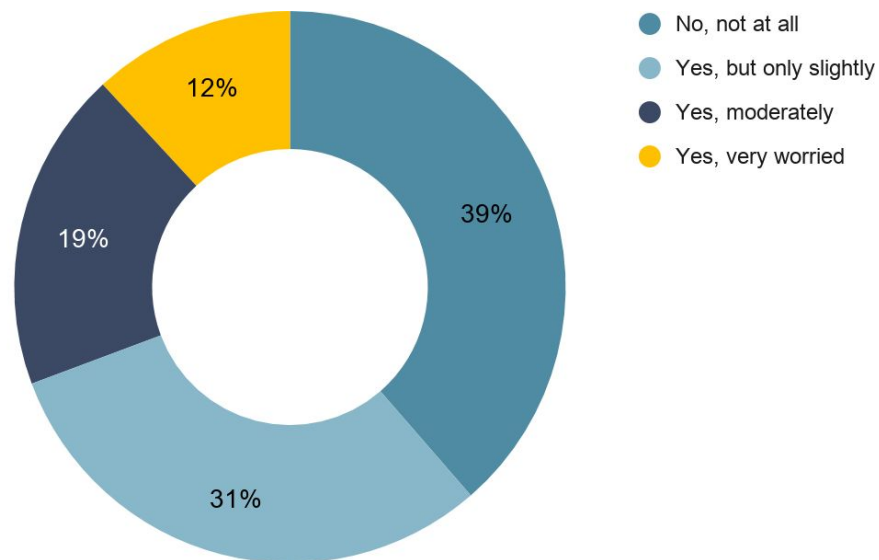
Financial concerns

AMA residents were more worried about the impact of coronavirus on their income than people living in the rest of the country

AMA



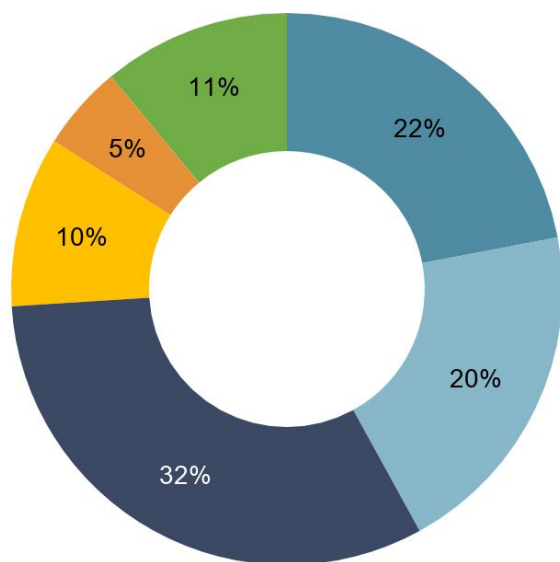
The rest of the country



Financial concerns

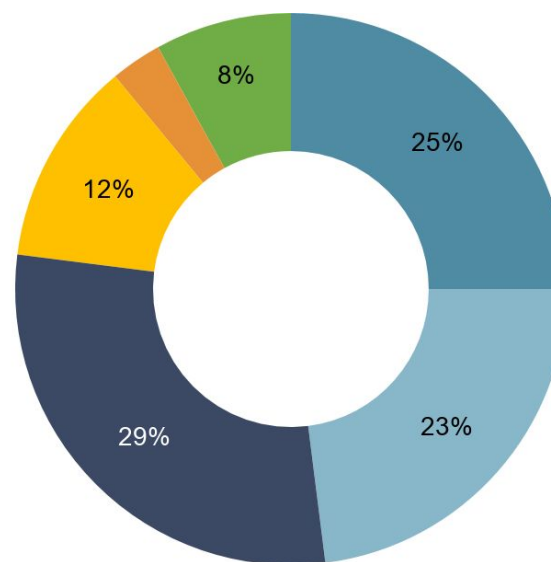
40% of AMA and 36% of respondents elsewhere say coronavirus has already had an impact on their household income. Slightly more AMA respondents have lost over 50%

AMA



- up to 10%
- 11% to 25%
- 26% to 50%
- 51% to 75%
- 76% to 90%
- over 90%

The rest of the country

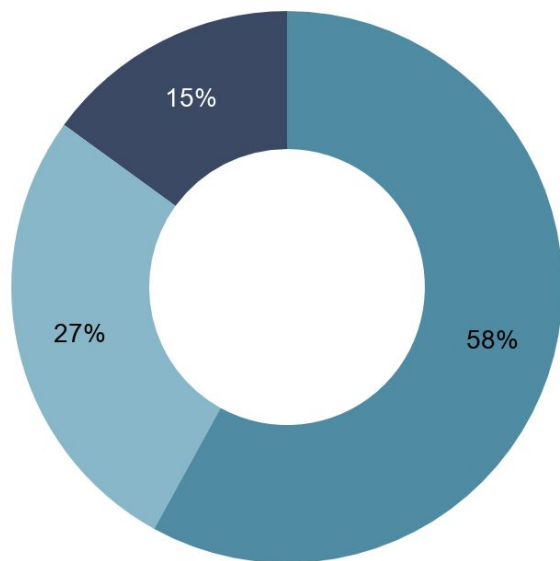


- up to 10%
- 11% to 25%
- 26% to 50%
- 51% to 75%
- 76% to 90%
- over 90%

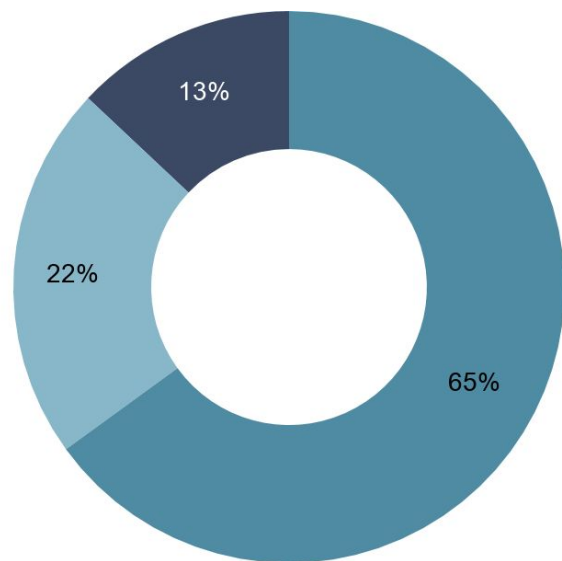
Leaving the Netherlands

AMA respondents were more likely to know of people who had left the Netherlands because of the pandemic, compared with respondents living elsewhere

AMA



The rest of the country



- No
- Yes, one or two
- Yes, more than two

- No
- Yes, one or two
- Yes, more than two

The experience of new arrivals

We have also looked briefly at the position of people who moved to the Netherlands within the last three years and who do not have large support networks or whose jobs may be less secure.

In total, 827 of the respondents have been in the Netherlands for less than three years.

- 56% would like more government or local authority information about coronavirus, compared with around 50% across the survey as a whole
- 48% of new arrivals have a permanent contract, compared with 63% of AMA respondents
- 32% have gross household income of less than €3,000 a month, compared with 20% of AMA respondents
- Just 11% say the pandemic has had no impact on their mental health
- 36% say they work in a sector that has been hard hit by coronavirus and 36% say they are worried their contract will not be renewed

Concluding remarks

Respondents' suggestions

'It would be nice if Gemeente Amsterdam initiated projects which help expats and foreigners connect with the Dutch population. With people sticking to their families and going out less, there is a chance that foreigners and expats become even more entrenched in their bubbles and less connected to Dutch society. Connection is key!'

'The NOW scheme provides for retraining, but all info and courses are in Dutch. Would be useful for those of us whose language skills are limited.'

'Sometimes the official wording is vague and it's not clear if something is a law or advice (e.g. is it a law to quarantine after traveling to an orange country).'

'I wish the guidelines and enforcement policies were clear - "recommending" people do things doesn't mean anything here.'

'Besides the measures there should be also help and guidance on how to tackle health issues and the negative impact of lack of social life.'

Concluding remarks

General

The international community is highly diverse but a clear majority (63%) say their home country is stricter than the Netherlands in terms of coronavirus measures. Many (51%) felt the Dutch government could and should be stricter in their measures. A positive attitude towards local policies has been decreasing over time, though 43% (versus 48%) have some or a lot of confidence in Dutch efforts.

Information

News websites targeting internationals and national government information sources are the main sources of information about Covid-19 in the Netherlands, but only half of respondents wanted more information from official sources. This figure is slightly higher for new arrivals.

In particular, two-thirds of the respondents (65%) would appreciate better or more information about travel – especially as it relates to missing family and friends from back home.

This is one area where official information could be clearer and more targeted to internationals.

Concluding remarks

Mental health

Just over half (52%) wanted more information about how to keep mentally healthy.

The impact on the mental health of respondents is something to keep an eye on, in particular the 17% who are unsure where to turn for help.

Just 2% of people reported having help from their employers, something which HR departments could take on board.

Loneliness and isolation are major issues, particularly among people who moved to the Netherlands recently and do not have local networks.

Finances

The financial consequences of Covid-19 for the international community are serious. While 65% of AMA respondents have permanent contracts, 40% have already experienced an impact on their household income, and 26% have lost at least half.

In the longer term, most respondents want to remain in the Netherlands, working partly from the office and partly at home.

About Stichting ICAP

ICAP is an initiative put together by four long-standing members of the international community to act as an independent bridge between the international community itself and government and civic organisations.

In particular, we aim to establish an independent forum which represents and reflects the views of the international community on issues which have an impact on the city's attractiveness as a place to live in and do business.

The city regularly scores very highly in international comparisons – facts which officials are keen to promote whenever possible. However, these glowing reports do not always reflect the reality on the ground. And Amsterdam lacks a broad framework for communicating with and receiving input/feedback from the international community and assessing its diverse needs and concerns. ICAP aims to change this.

www.icapnl.com