ESRI

Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Social Activity Measure
March 1st – 9th 2022

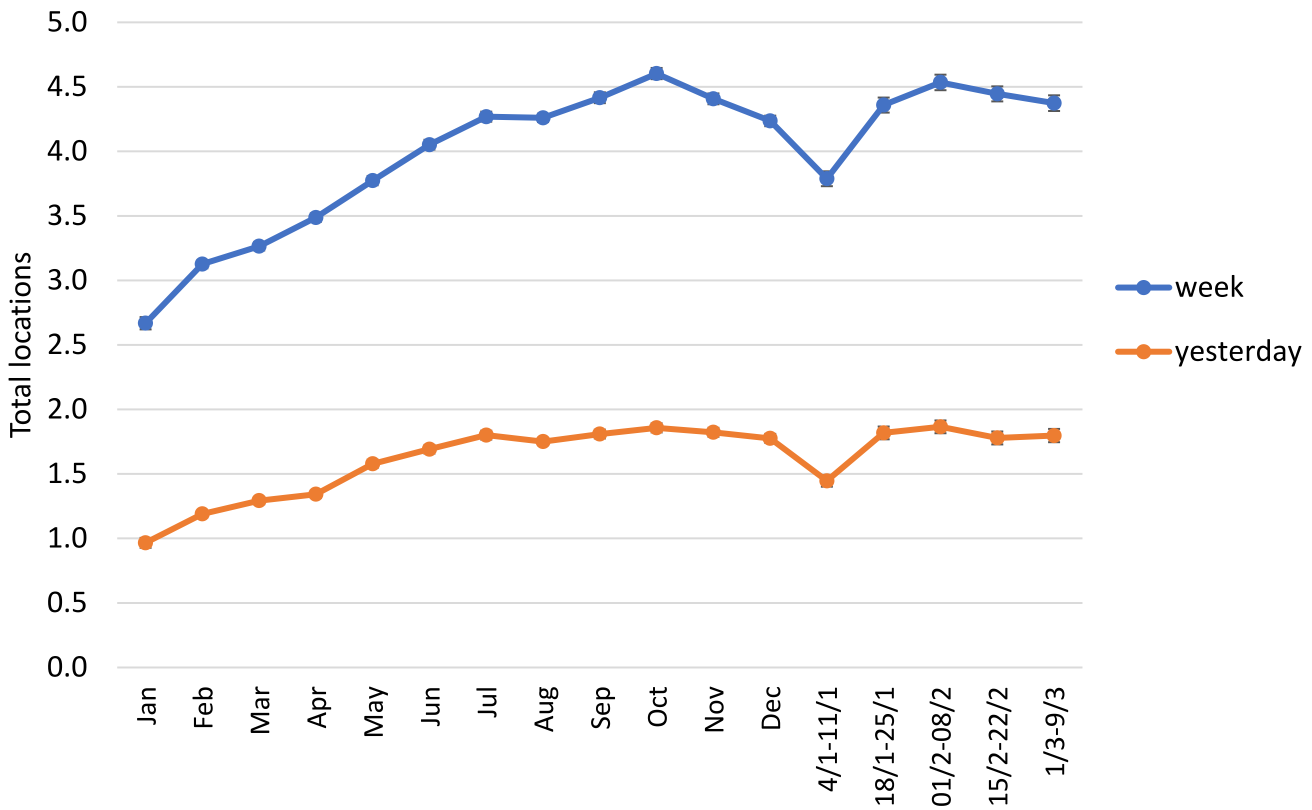
ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The Social Activity Measure (SAM) is a behavioural study that records the public response to the risk of COVID-19 infection over time. Designed by the ESRI's Behavioural Research Unit (BRU), SAM is an anonymous, interactive, online study that surveys people about their recent activity. The study offers insight into where and how risks of COVID-19 transmission arise. SAM aims to inform policy regarding the opening of parts of the economy and society, while keeping COVID-19 under control. The research was designed by the BRU in consultation with the Department of the Taoiseach, which funds the work. The survey is completely anonymous. Where comparisons between survey rounds are highlighted, they are statistically significant.

TIMING

This slide deck presents results from a nationally representative sample of 1,000 people aged 18 and over who participated in the study between March 1st and 9th 2022. Data were collected six weeks after the lifting of the majority of public health restrictions. The mask mandate was lifted on February 28th (days before data collection); however, mask wearing continued to be advised on public transport and in healthcare settings. The previous wave of SAM coincided with a period of bad weather including multiple storms and recorded some declines in social activity.

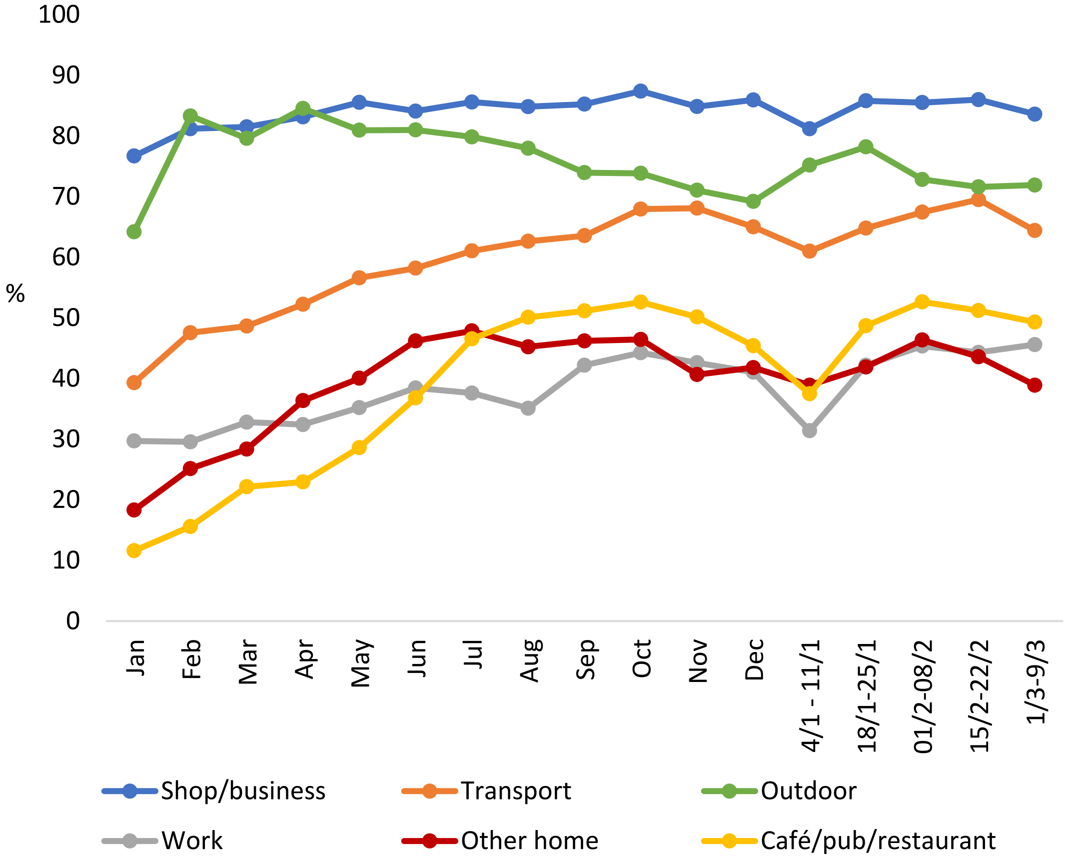
Total locations visited

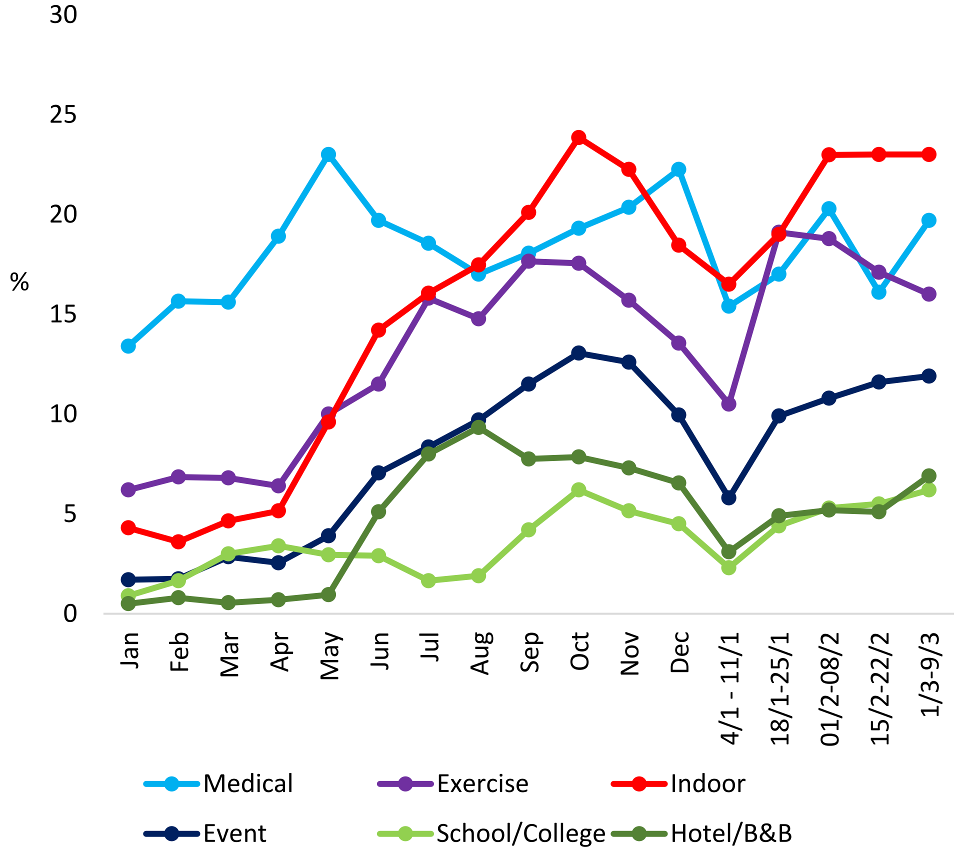


There was no significant change in locations visited either over the previous week or the previous day.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

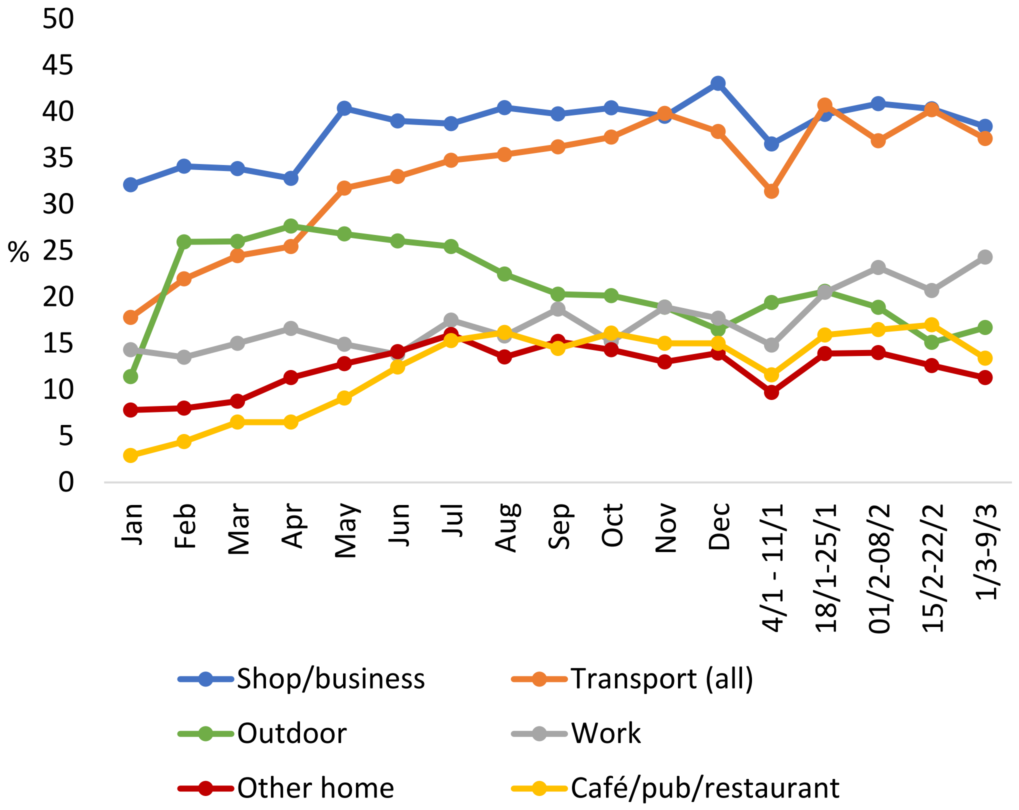
Locations visited (previous week)

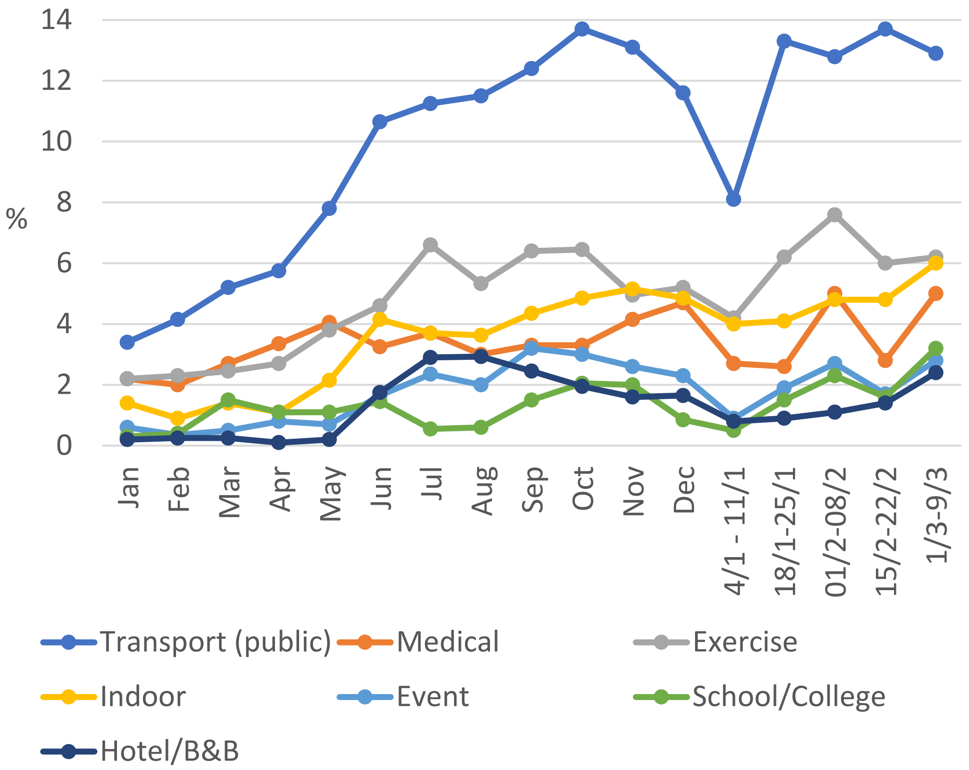




Visits to other homes and use of transport were significantly lower than the previous wave. The previous decline in visits to medical facilities recovered and there was a significant increase in visits to hotels compared to the previous wave. Note that ‘Exercise’ relates to visits to exercise facilities and not other activities like walking or running.

Locations visited (yesterday)

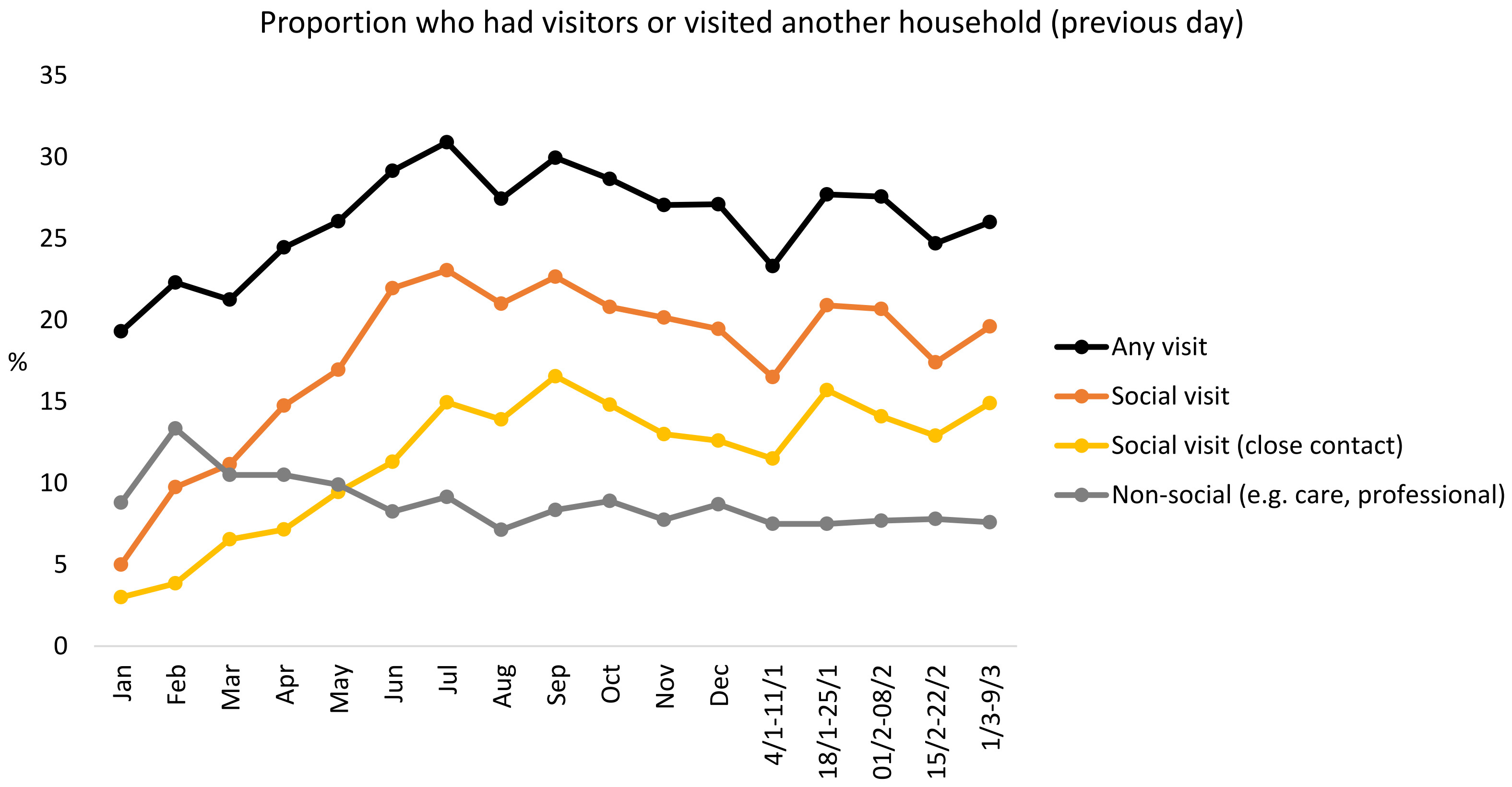




There were significant declines in visits to cafés and pubs, whereas significant increases were observed in attendance at schools/colleges, events, medical facilities, and work.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

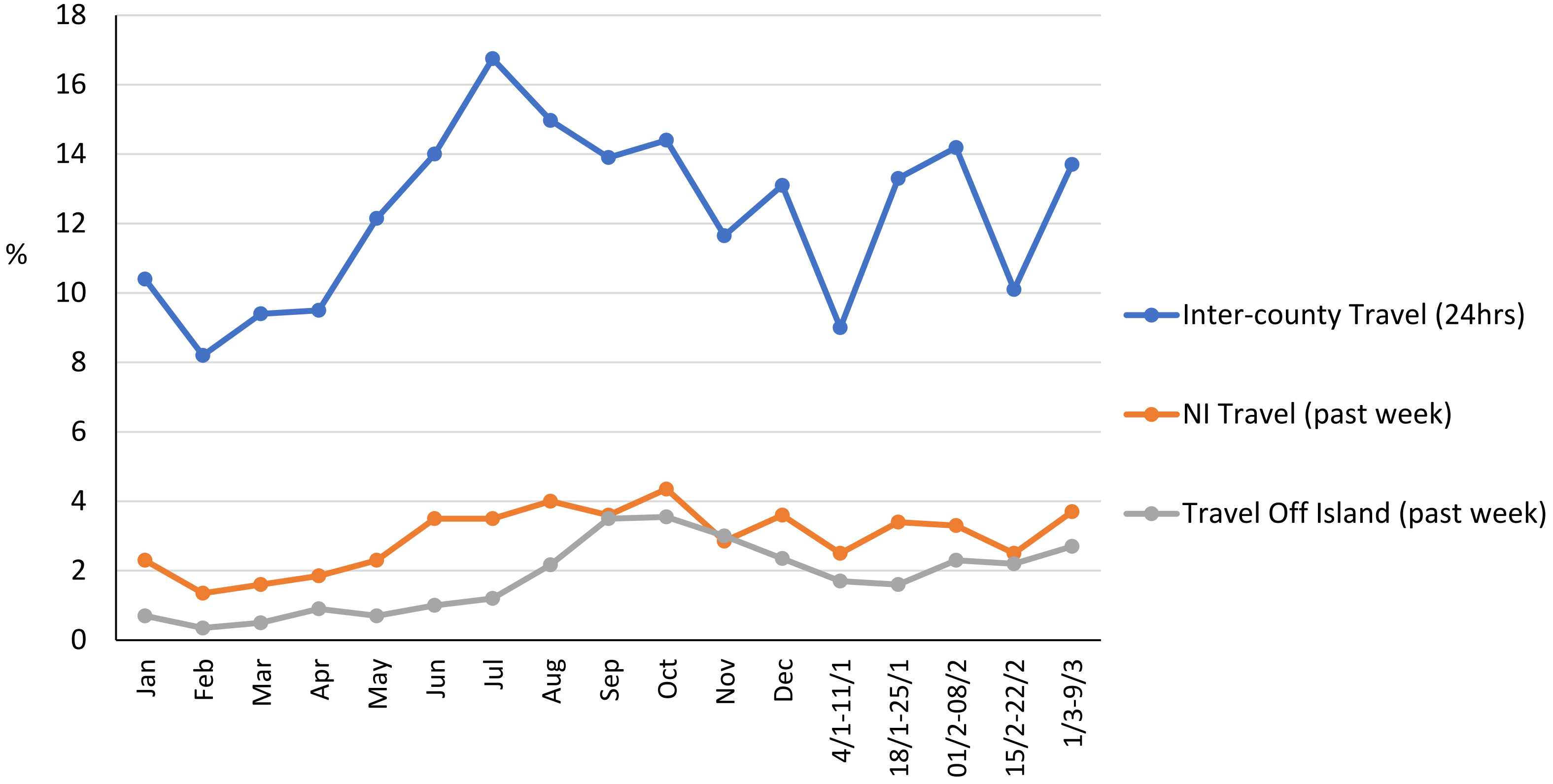
Home Visits



The dip in home visits observed in late February recovered, although the change was not significant.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

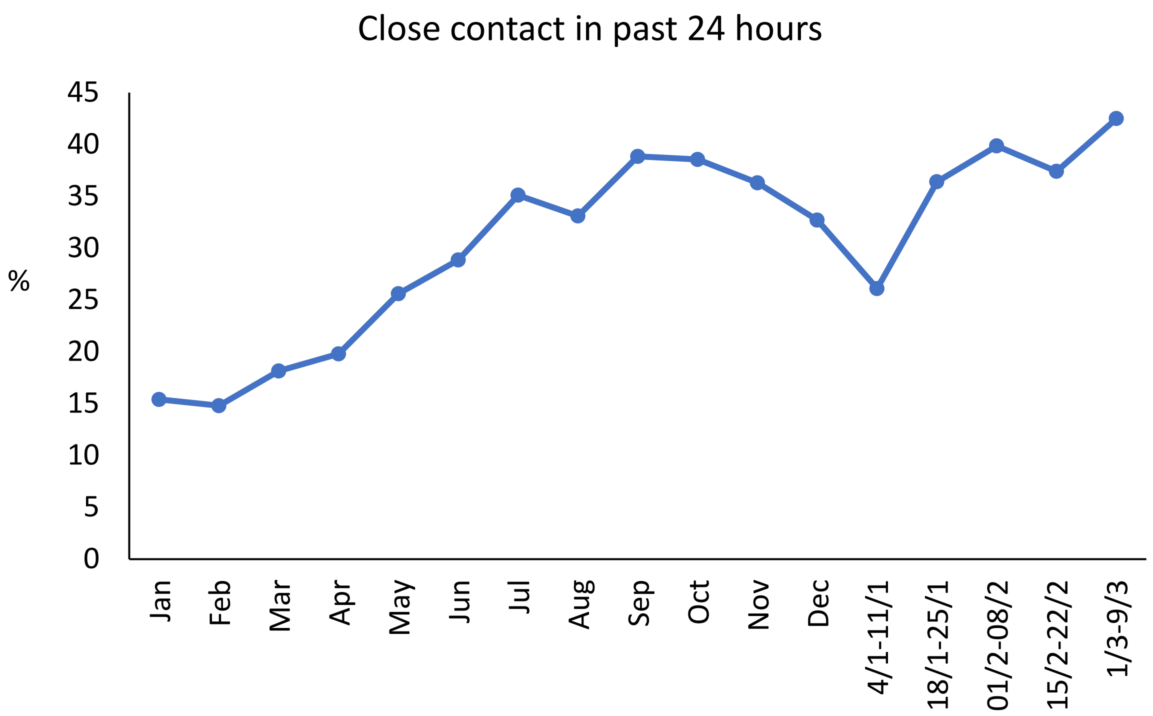
National and international travel



The previous decline in inter-county travel recovered and travel to Northern Ireland increased compared to the previous wave.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

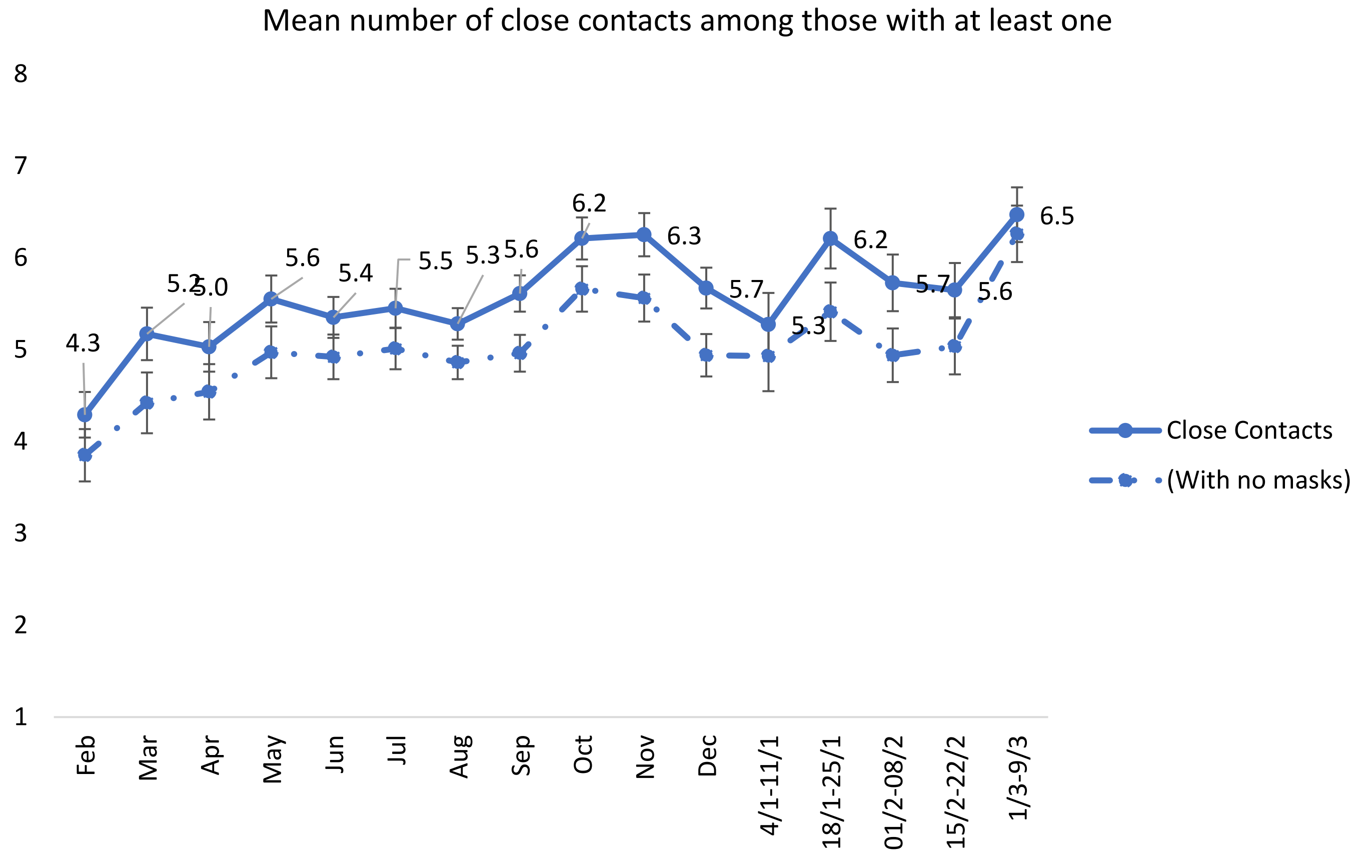
Close contacts



The proportion of people who had a close contact the previous day increased significantly in this round of SAM and is now at its highest since SAM started at 42.5%. The proportion has trended slowly upwards following the initial step-jump when restrictions lifted.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

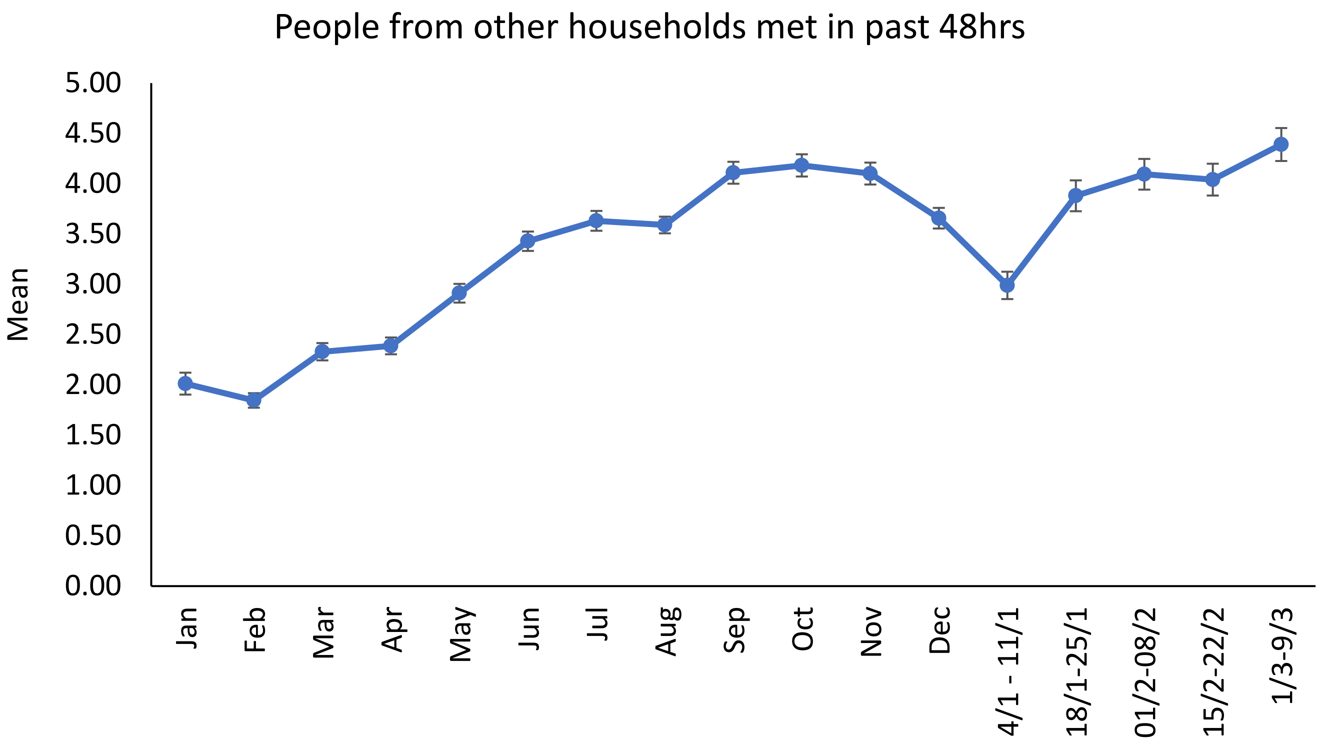
Number of close contacts



Among those who had a close contact the previous day, the mean number of close contacts increased. The average number of close contacts without a mask also rose significantly. Both are at their highest since SAM began.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

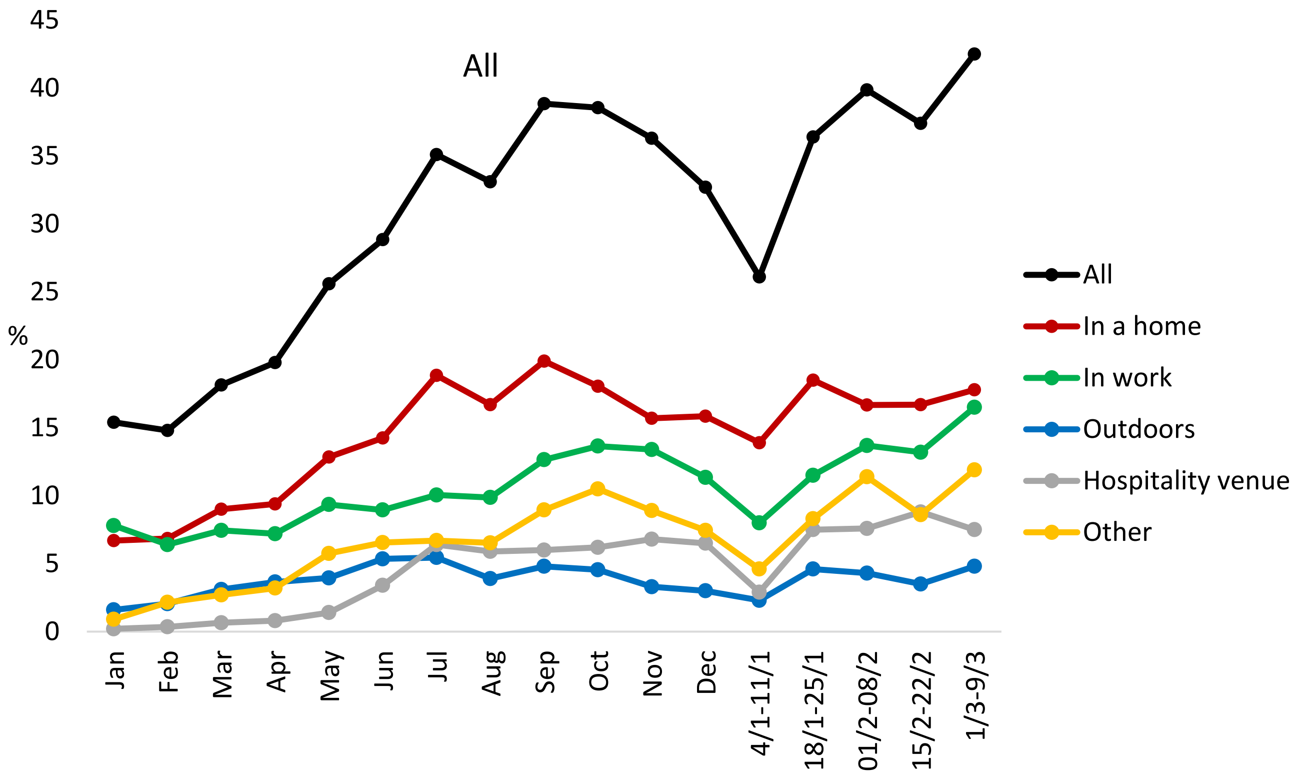
Number of people met

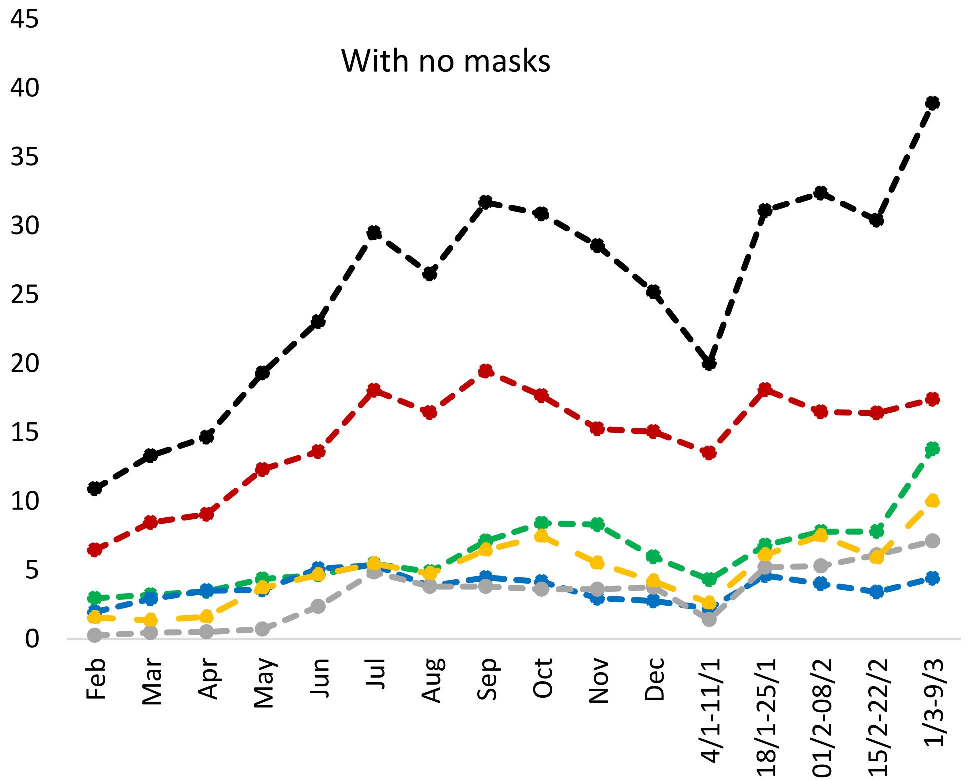


The average number of people met remains on an upward trend since January, however wave-on-wave comparisons tend to be non-significant.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

Close contacts - locations

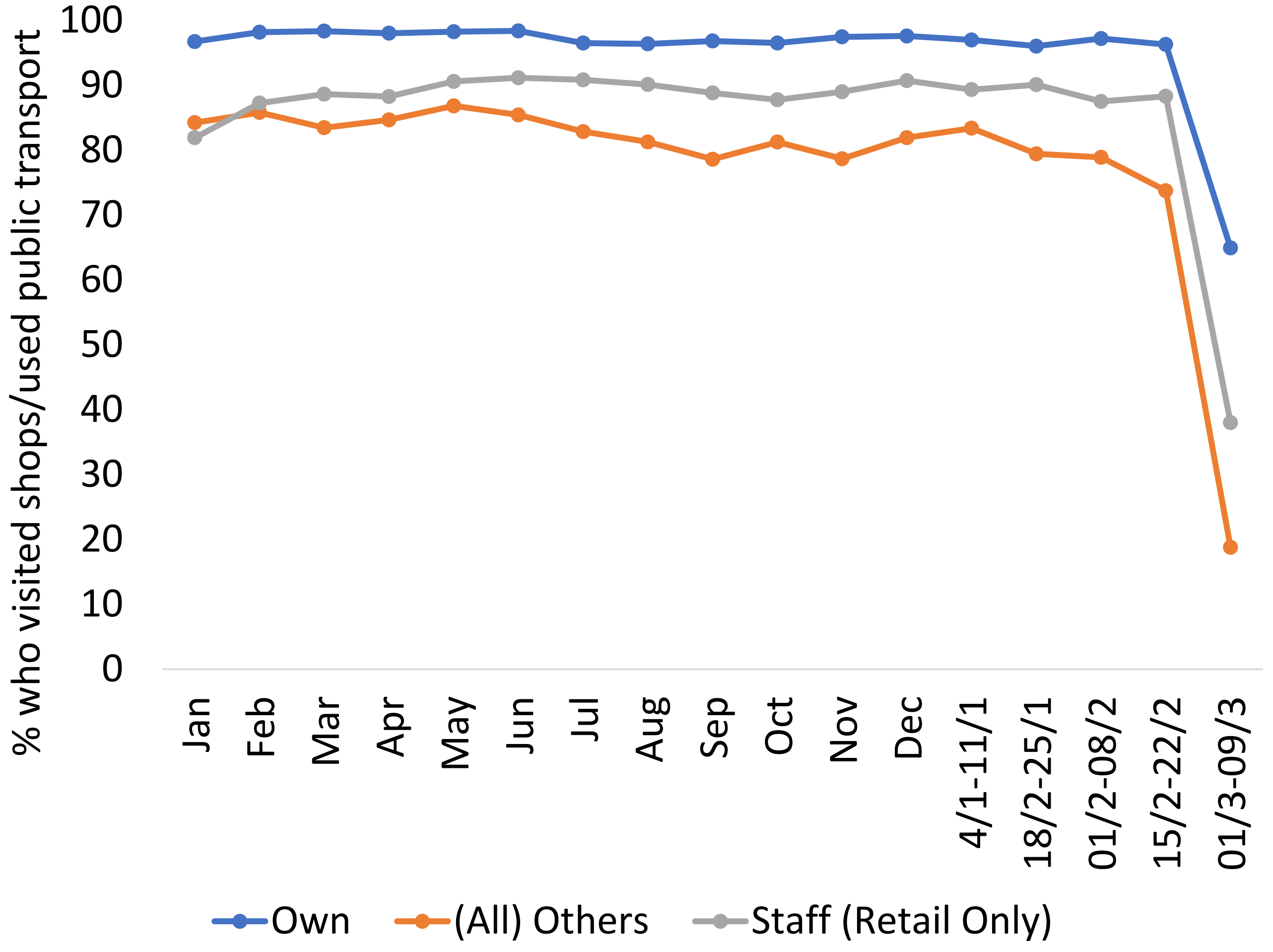




There was a significant increase in the proportion of the population who had a close contact in total and without masks, and both are at their highest since SAM started. Significant increases of close contacts (with and without masks) were at work and other locations.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

Masks in Retail and on Public Transport



There was a sharp drop in mask-wearing in retail settings and on public transport following the lifting of the mask mandate on Feb 28th. (Note that masks continued to be advised on public transport and in healthcare settings.)

The drop is sharpest among reports that staff (in retail only) and all other customers/passengers wore a mask.

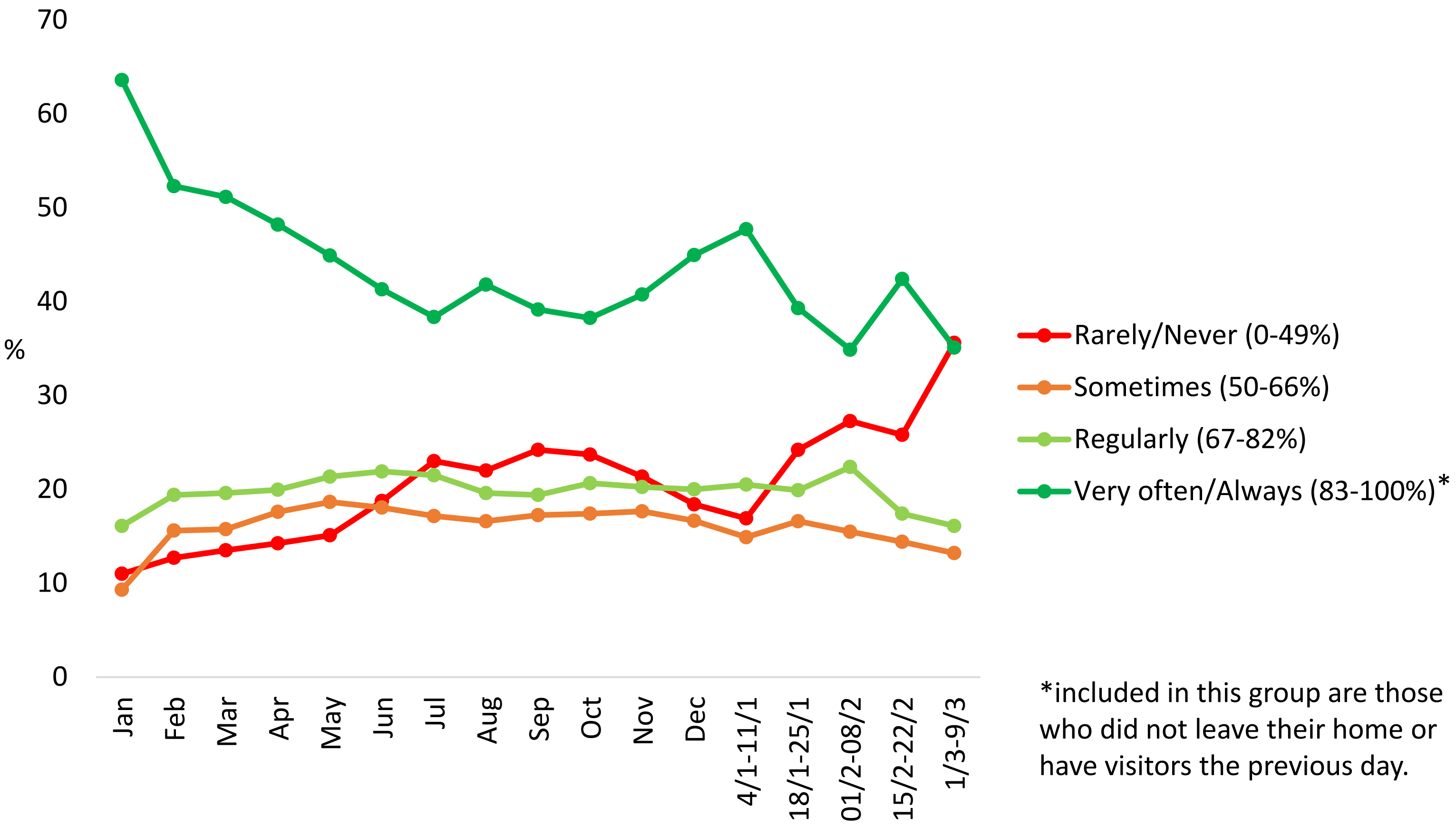
However, almost two in three people (65%) report that they continue to wear a mask in these settings.

Note that this analysis is heavily weighted towards retail (90:10) as there are more observations, but the trend is similar when both settings are analysed separately.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

Mitigation

Frequency of mitigative behaviours (wearing a mask, keeping 2m, sanitising hands)

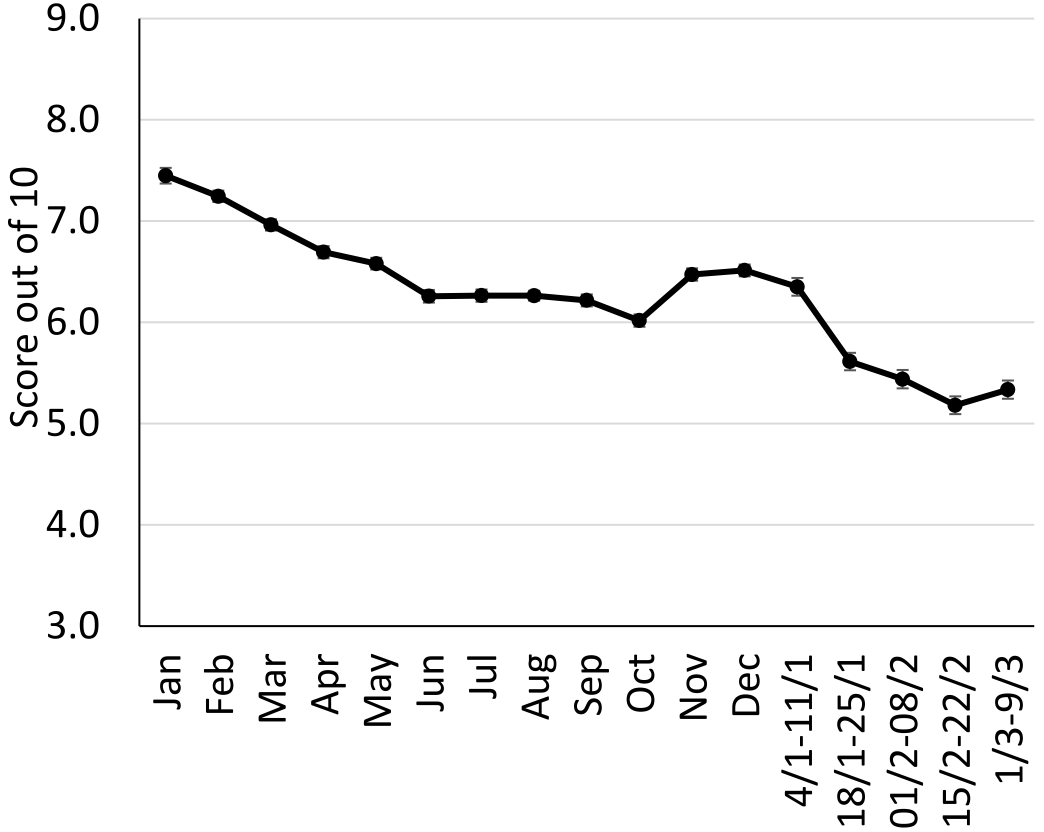


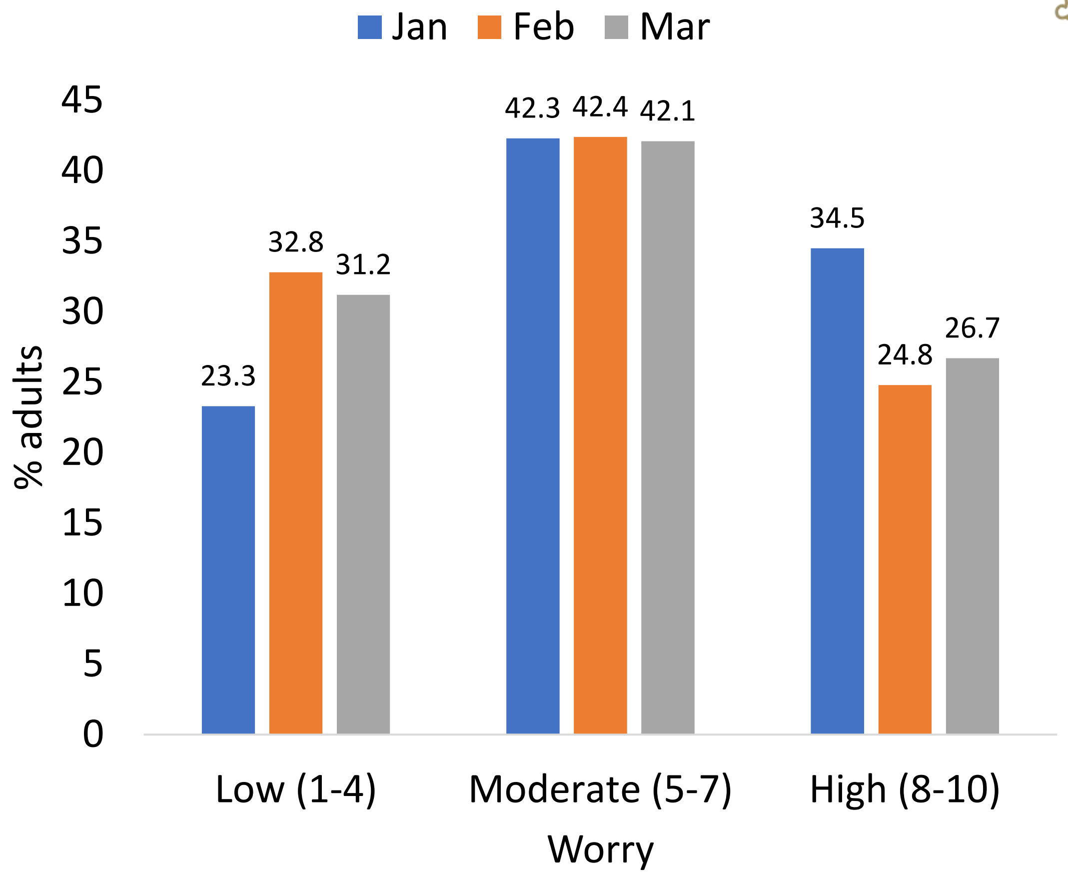
*included in this group are those who did not leave their home or have visitors the previous day.

The previously recorded increase in the proportion of people very often/always engaging in mitigative behaviours (keeping distance, washing hands, wearing masks) returned to early February levels. There was a sharp increase in the proportion saying that they rarely/never engage in such behaviours which is now at its highest since SAM started. This change is likely driven by the change in requirements to wear a mask. There was no significant change in the proportion reporting that they sometimes or regularly engage in mitigative behaviours.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

Worry

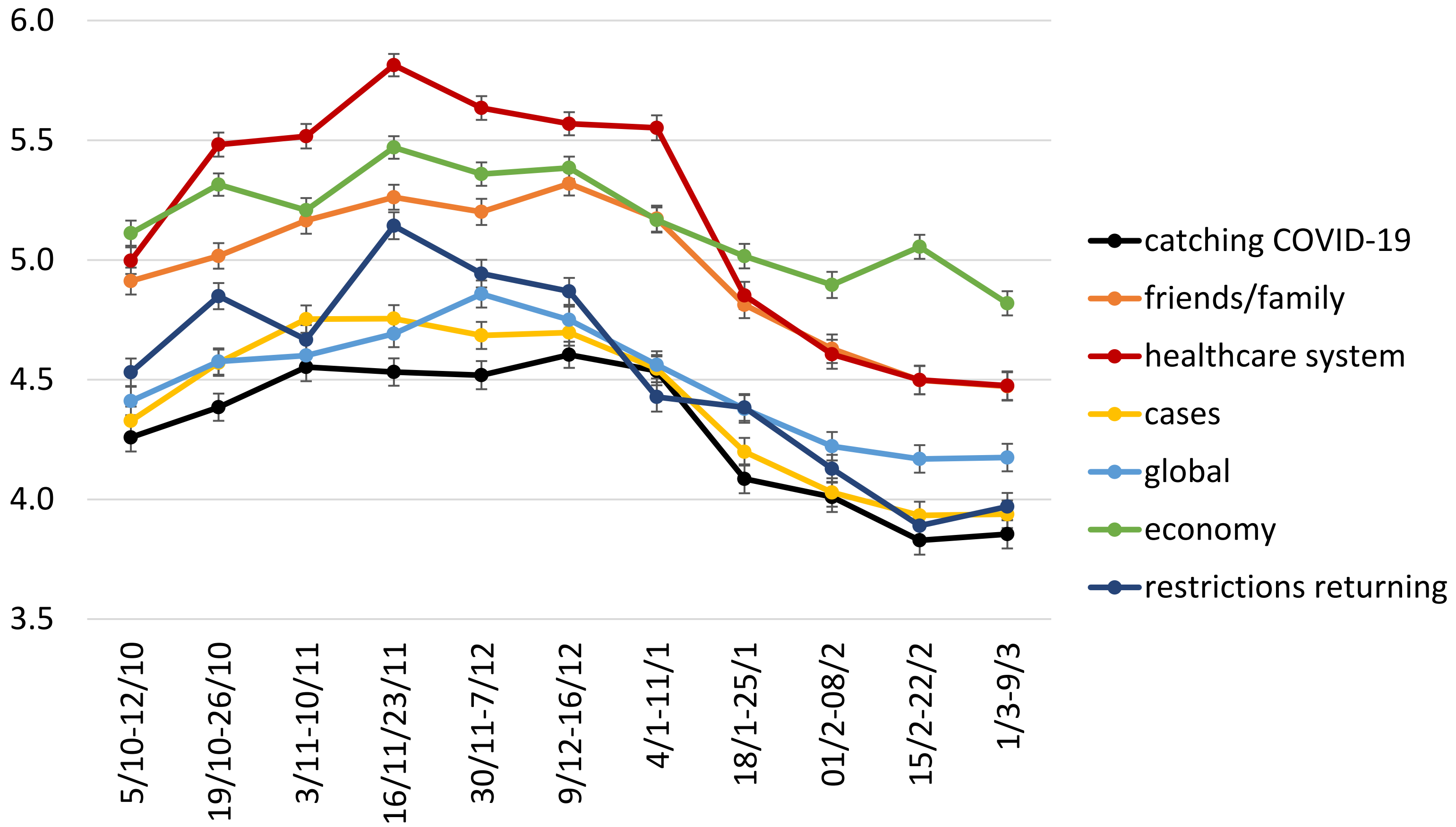




Overall worry about COVID-19 has remained stable since late January. One-in-four people remain highly worried.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

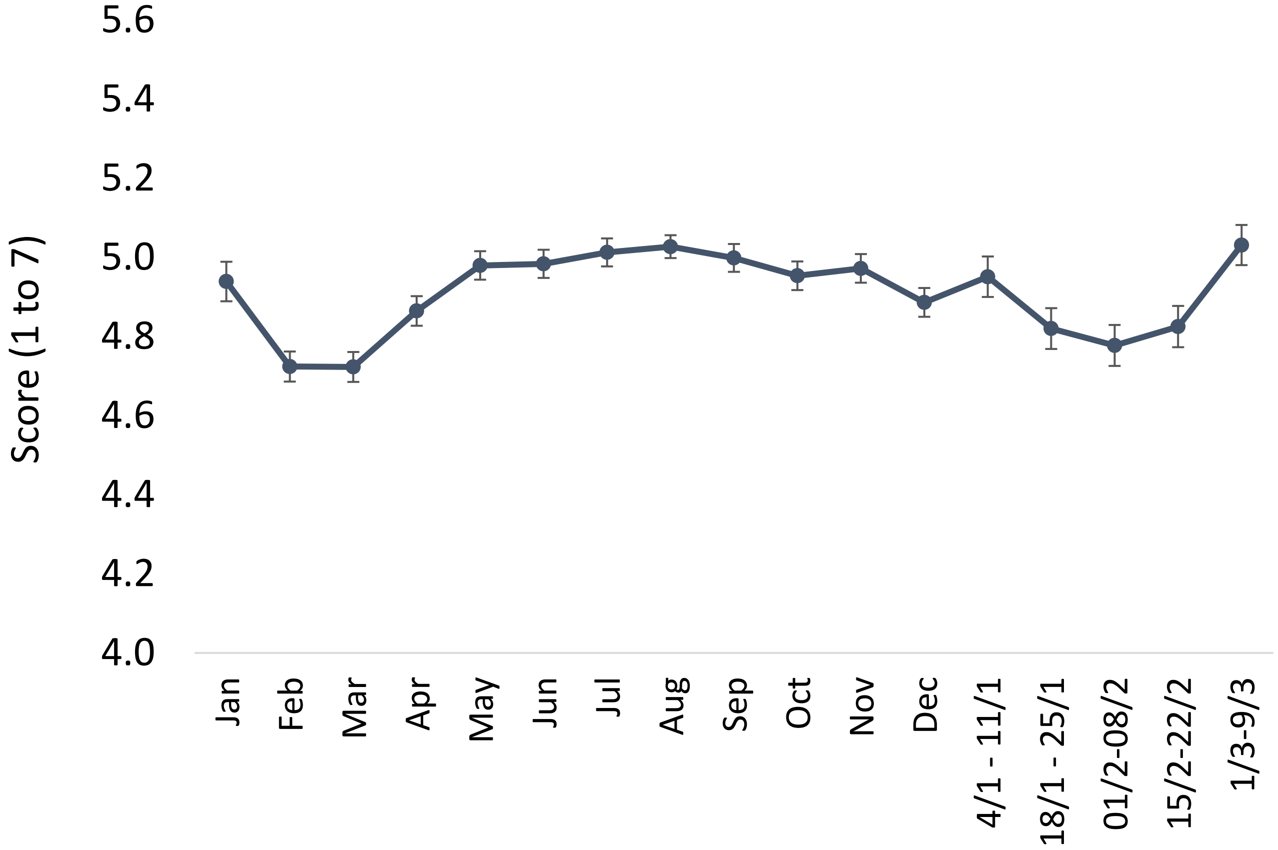
Worry

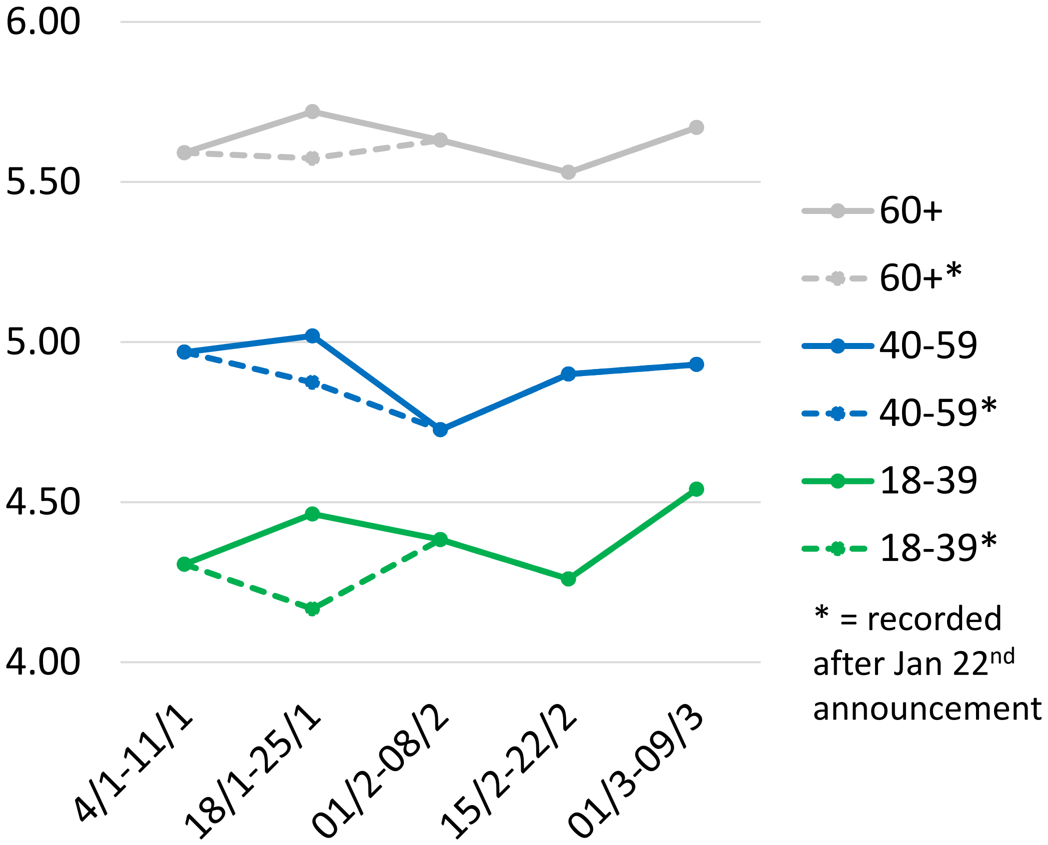


Most individual sources of worry have remained stable. The rise in worry about the economy observed in late February fell back to early February levels.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

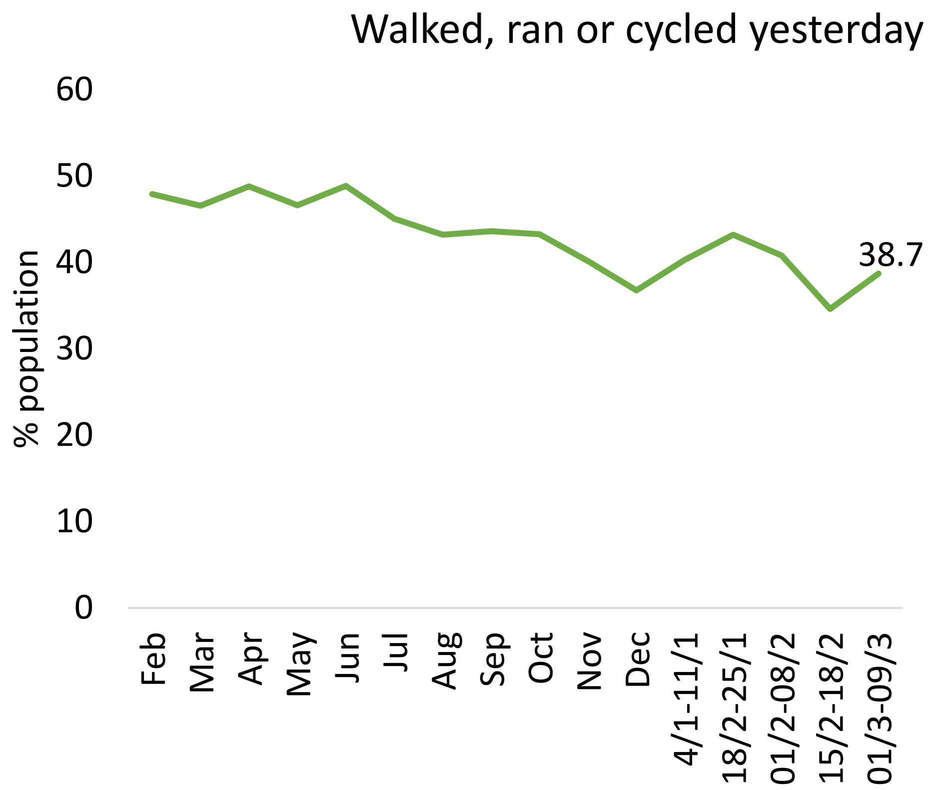
Wellbeing

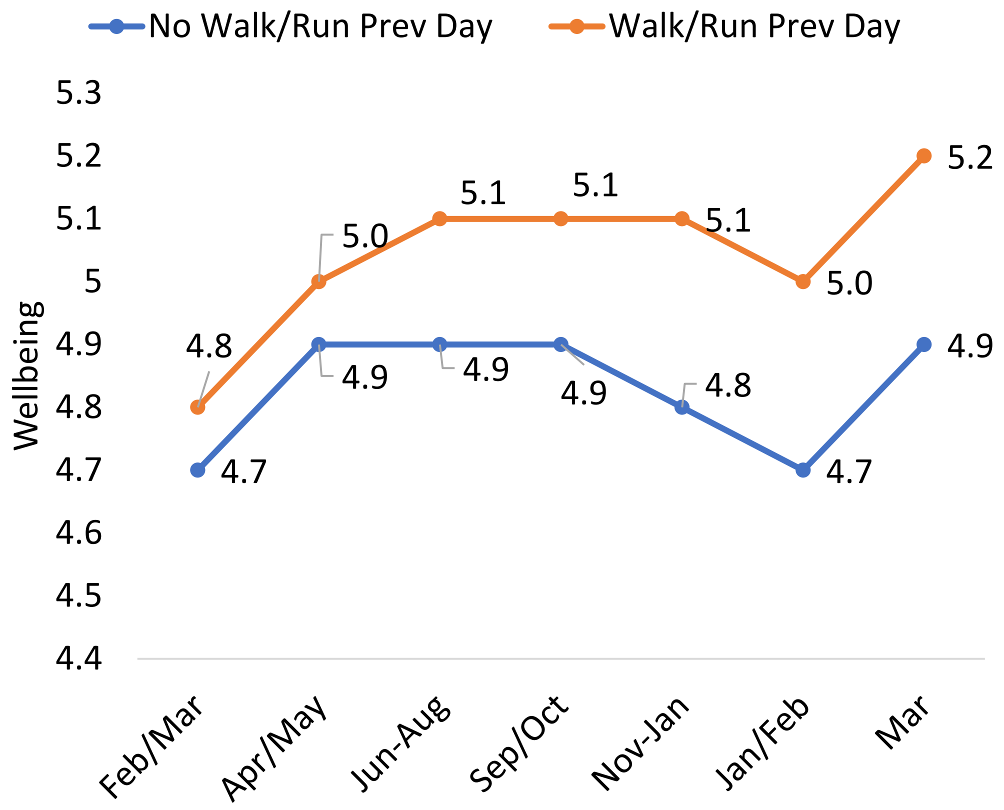




Self-reported wellbeing increased significantly in this round of SAM, and has reached its highest since last summer. The rise in wellbeing is driven by a significant increase among the youngest age cohort. The dip in wellbeing among the middle-aged cohort observed following the lifting of restrictions recovered in the last wave of SAM and remains stable.

Wellbeing and Exercise

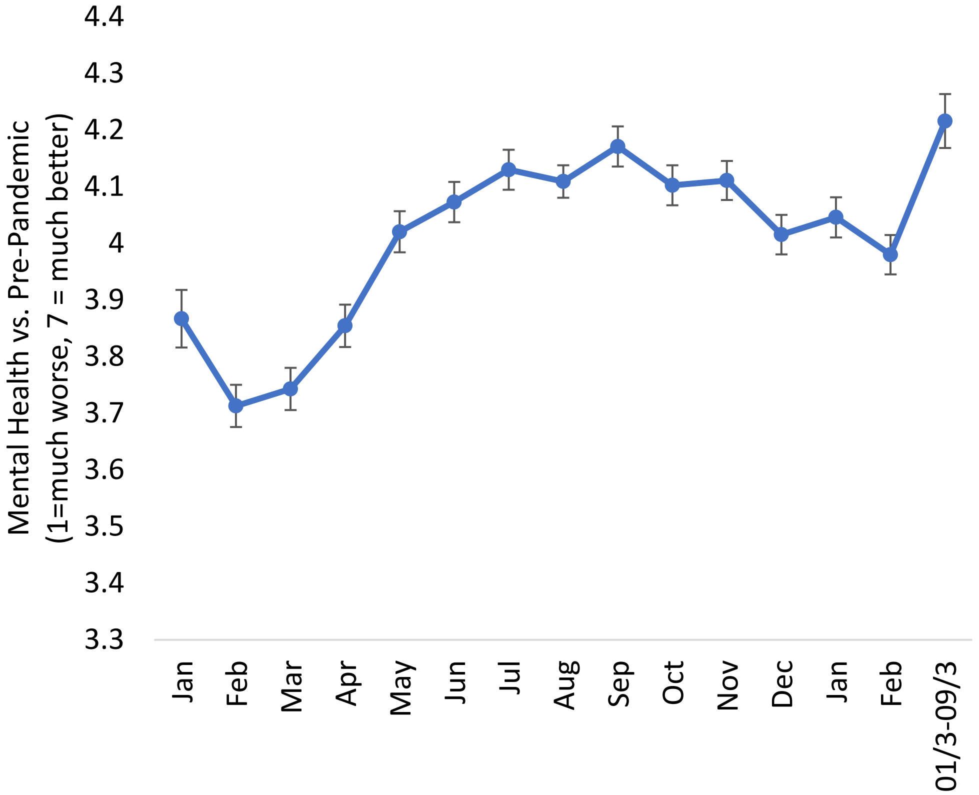


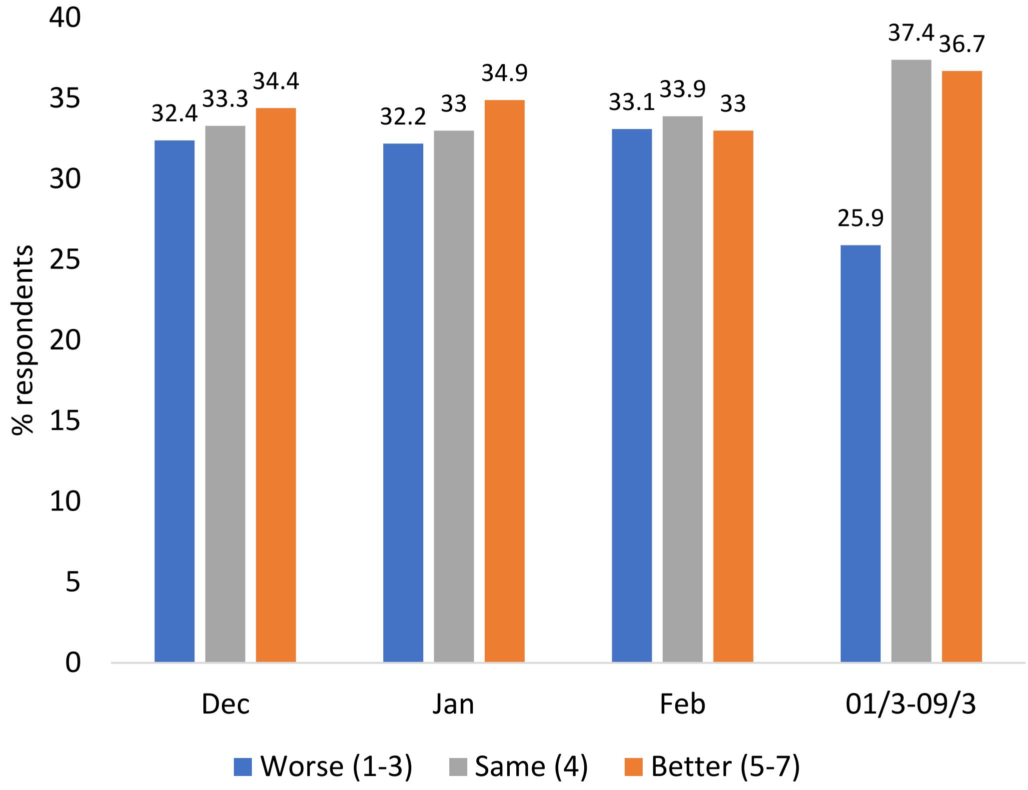


The proportion of the population who reporting going for a walk, run or cycle in their local area recovered following the period of bad weather in late February but remains significantly lower than March 2021 (left chart). The rise in wellbeing in this wave is observed among those who recently exercised as well as those who haven't, but the gap in wellbeing between these groups remains.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

Mental Health vs. Pre-Pandemic

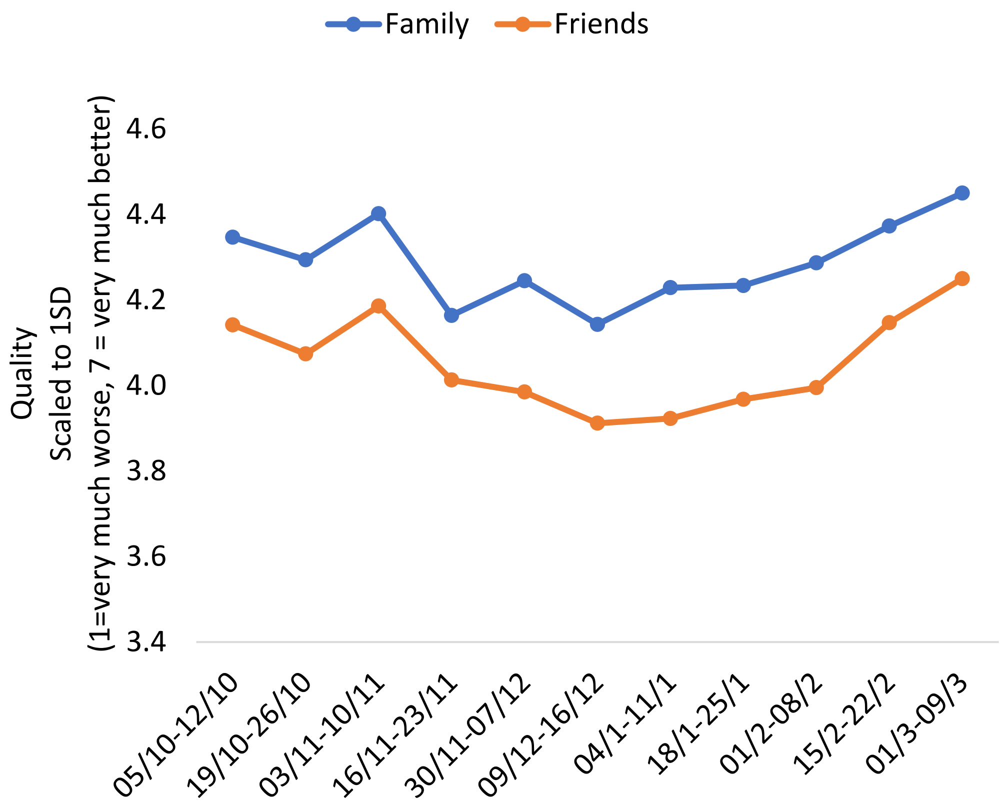


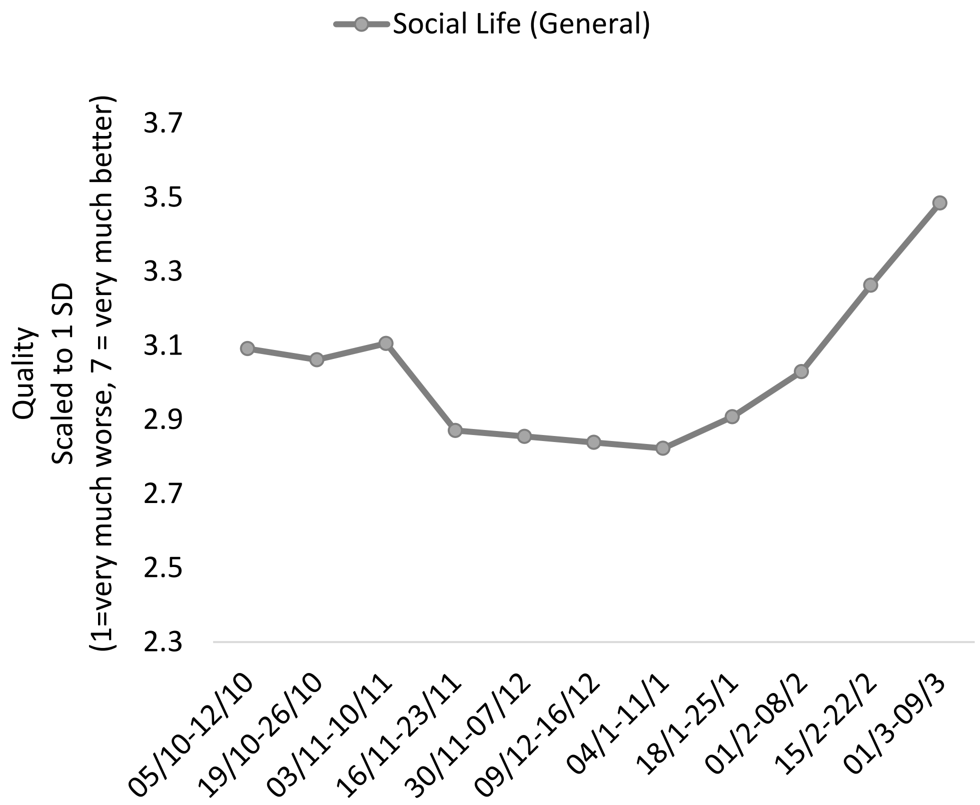


The improvement in wellbeing is also observed when people are asked about their mental health compared to before the pandemic. The average response increased significantly in this round, driven by a 20% (7%-pt) drop in those reporting their mental health is worse compared to before the pandemic.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

Quality of Relationships & Social Life

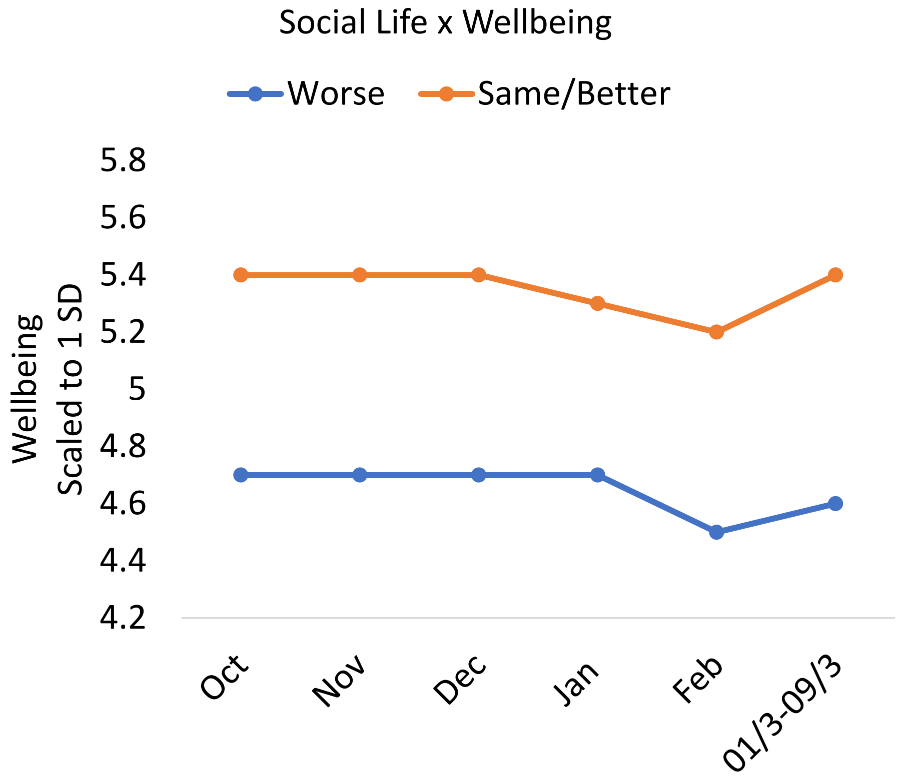




Judgements of the quality of relationships with friends and family continue to trend upwards, although the change since the previous wave is non-significant. There was a significant improvement in the overall quality of social lives in this wave, which has increased sharply (by almost half a standard deviation) since restrictions lifted.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

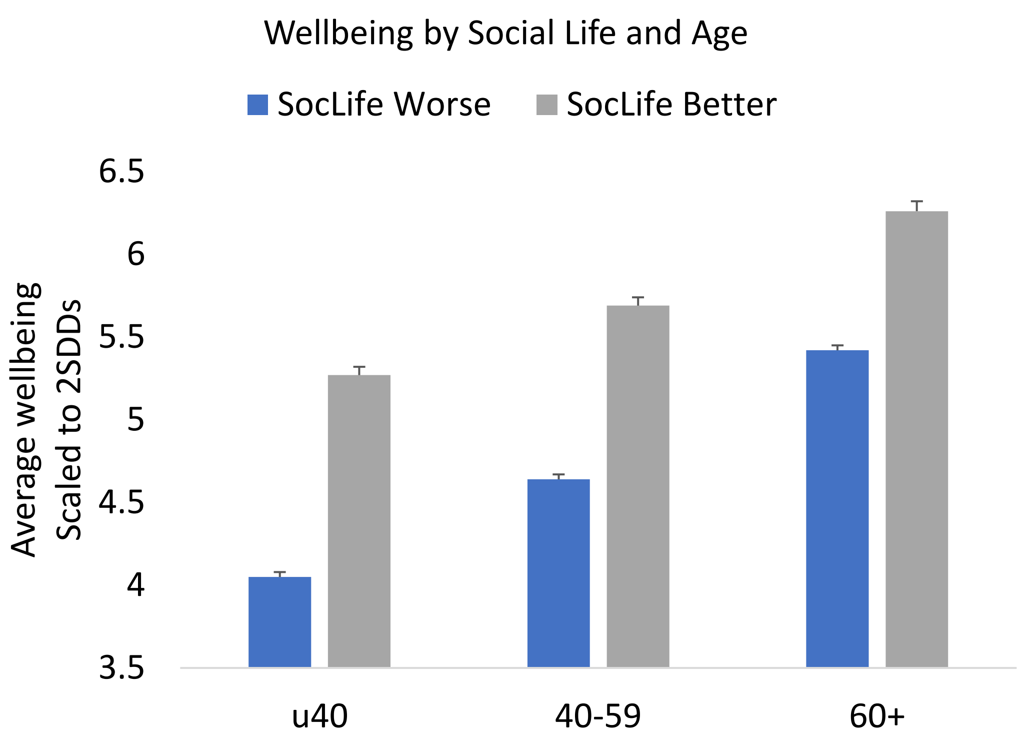
Social Life and Wellbeing

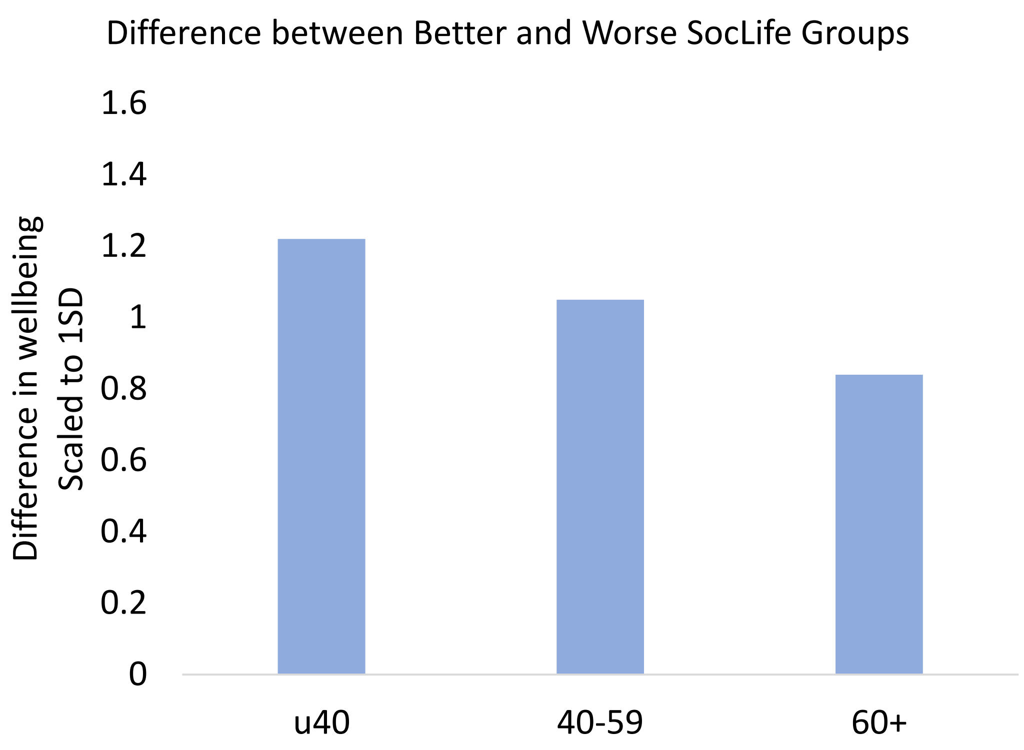


Perceived quality of social life is strongly linked to wellbeing. Part of the increase in general wellbeing may be linked to the increase in the proportion of people perceiving their social life to be the same or better than before the pandemic, which has increased by over 50% (19%-pts) since January.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

Social Life and Wellbeing

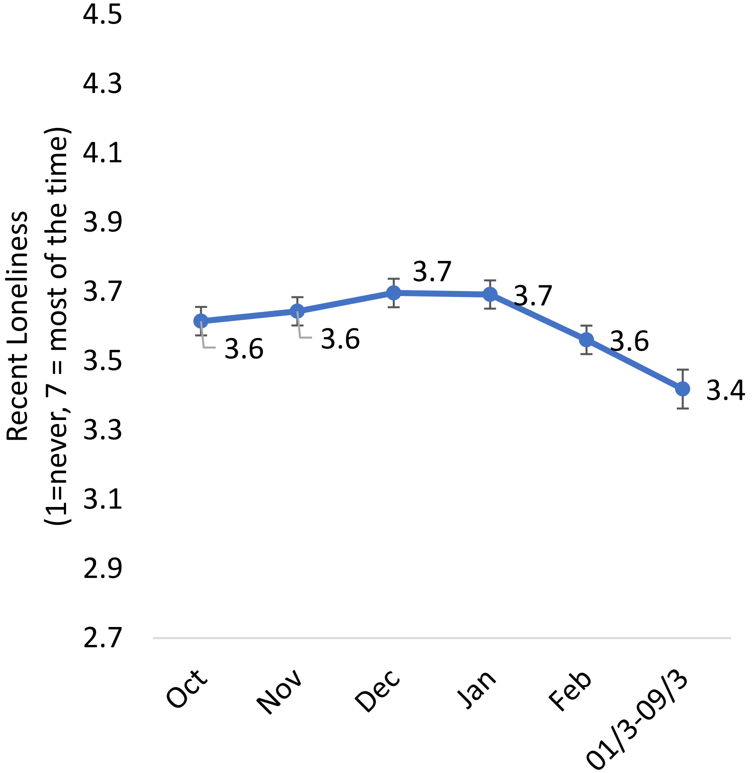


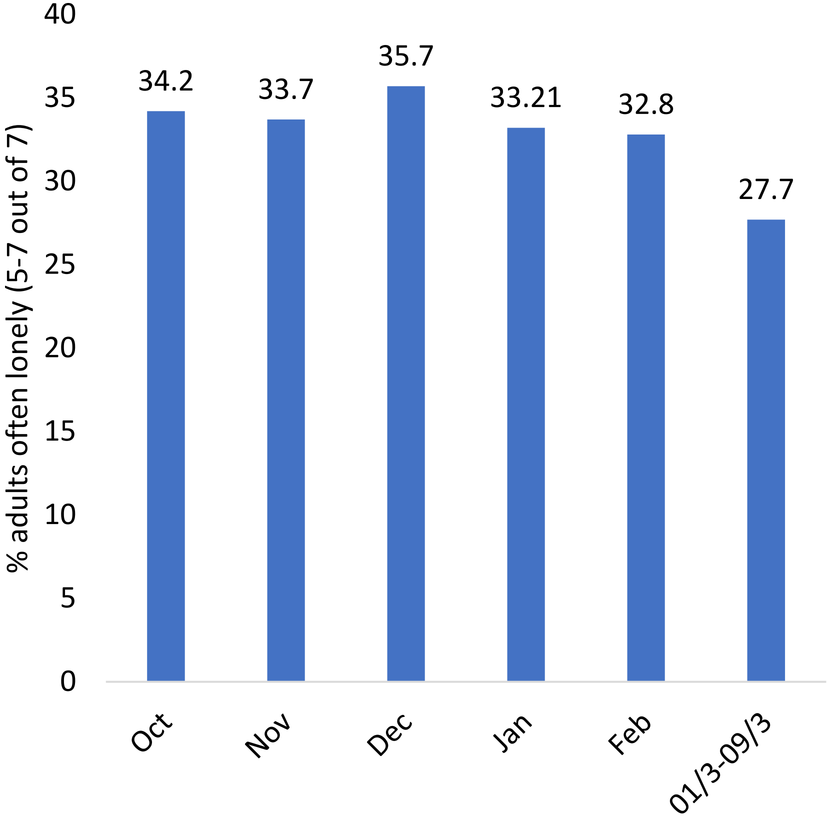


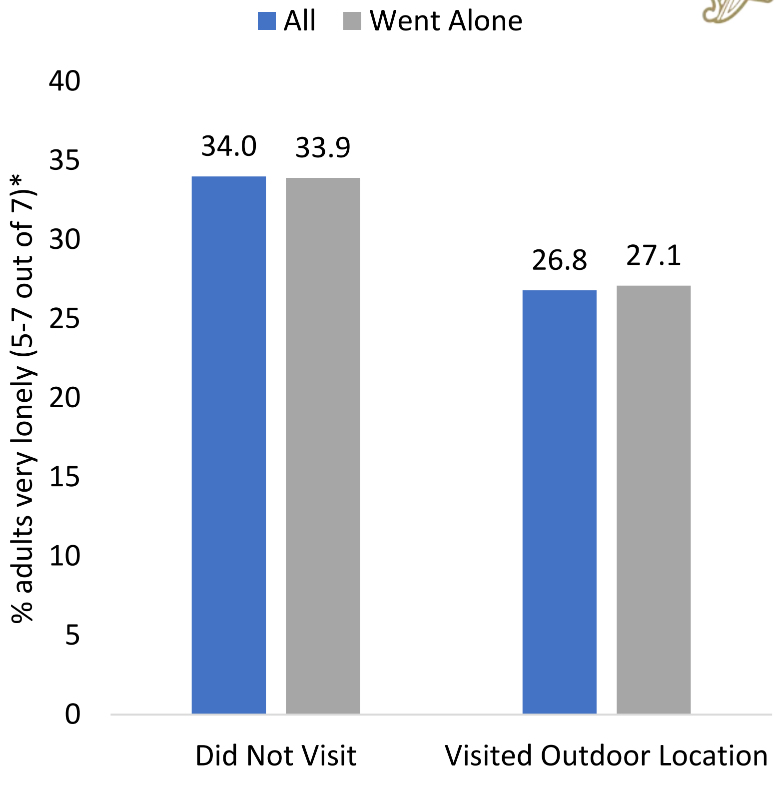
The difference in wellbeing between those with a worse social life and those with the same or better social life is larger among younger people.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

Loneliness





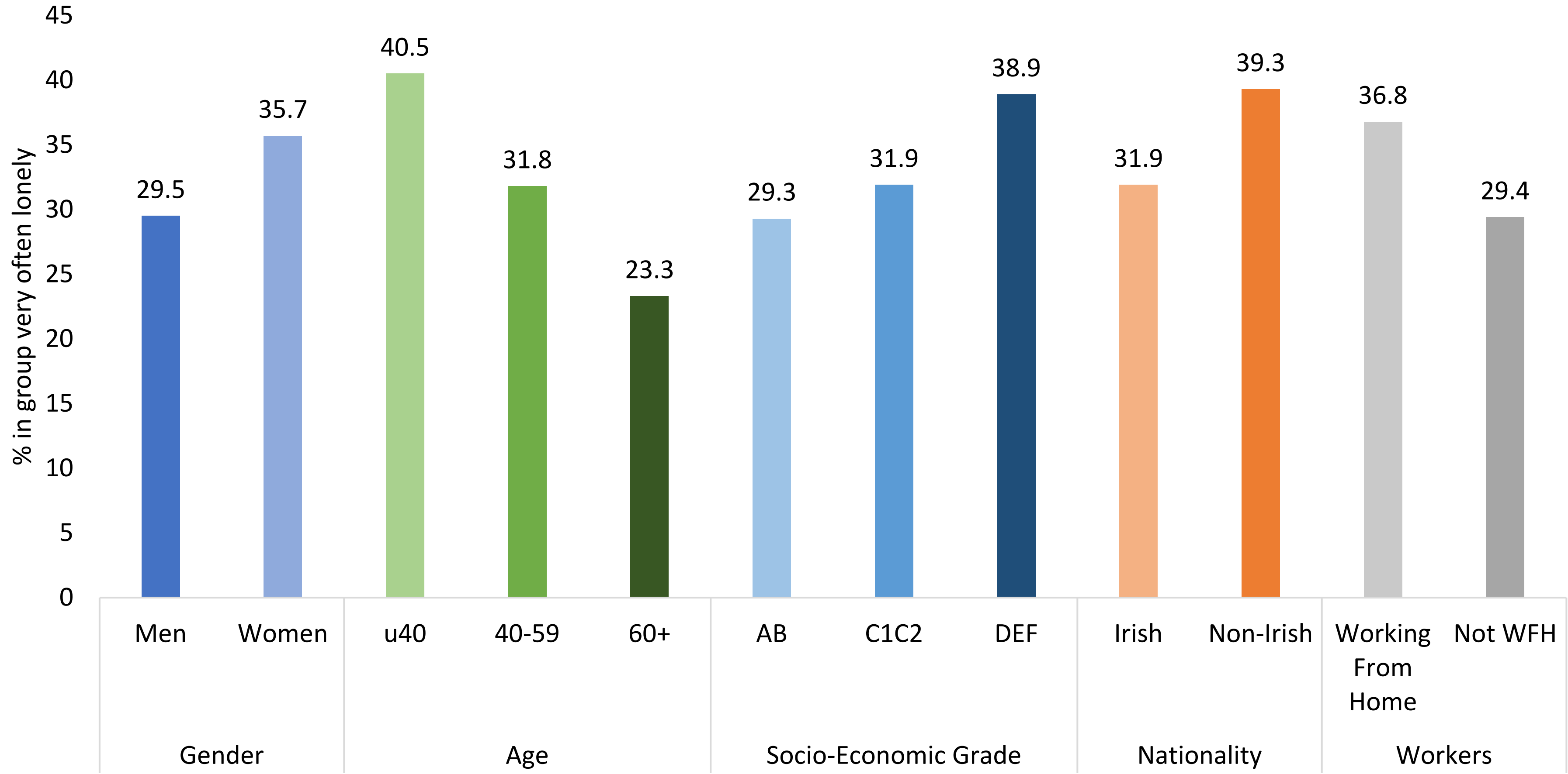


*Note this analysis pools all responses since January.

Average frequency of loneliness also declined in this wave of SAM, with a significant drop in the percentage of the population reporting feeling lonely most of the time (5-7 on the scale). Visiting outdoor locations (e.g. parks) is linked with less frequent loneliness, even among those who visit outdoor locations alone.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

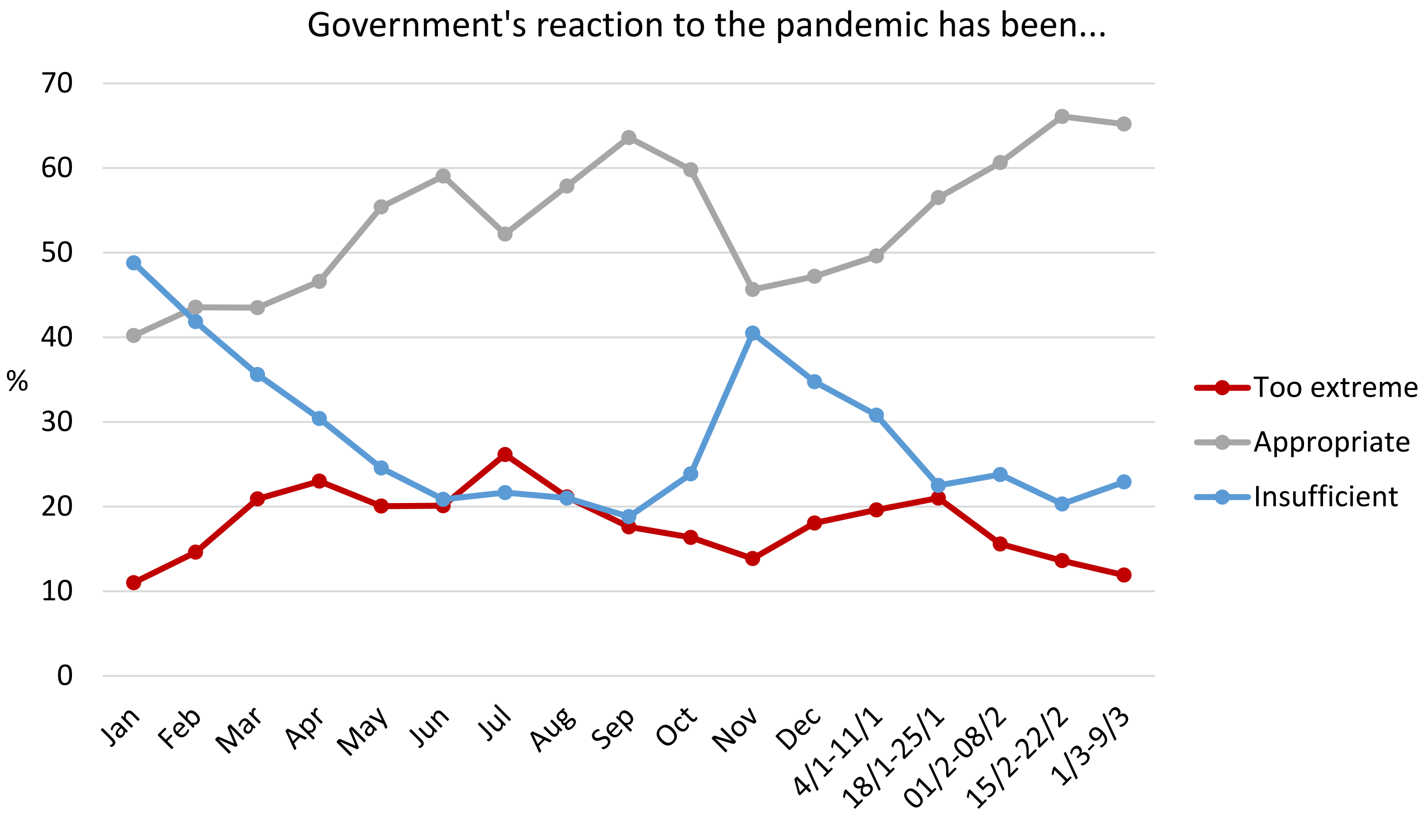
Loneliness



Gender, age, socio-economic grade and nationality are strong predictors of loneliness. Age shows the strongest relationship, with 40% of under 40s giving a score of 5-7 out of 7 compared to 23% of those over 60.
Among workers, those who report working from home report being lonely more often than those not working from home.
Note this analysis pools all responses since January.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

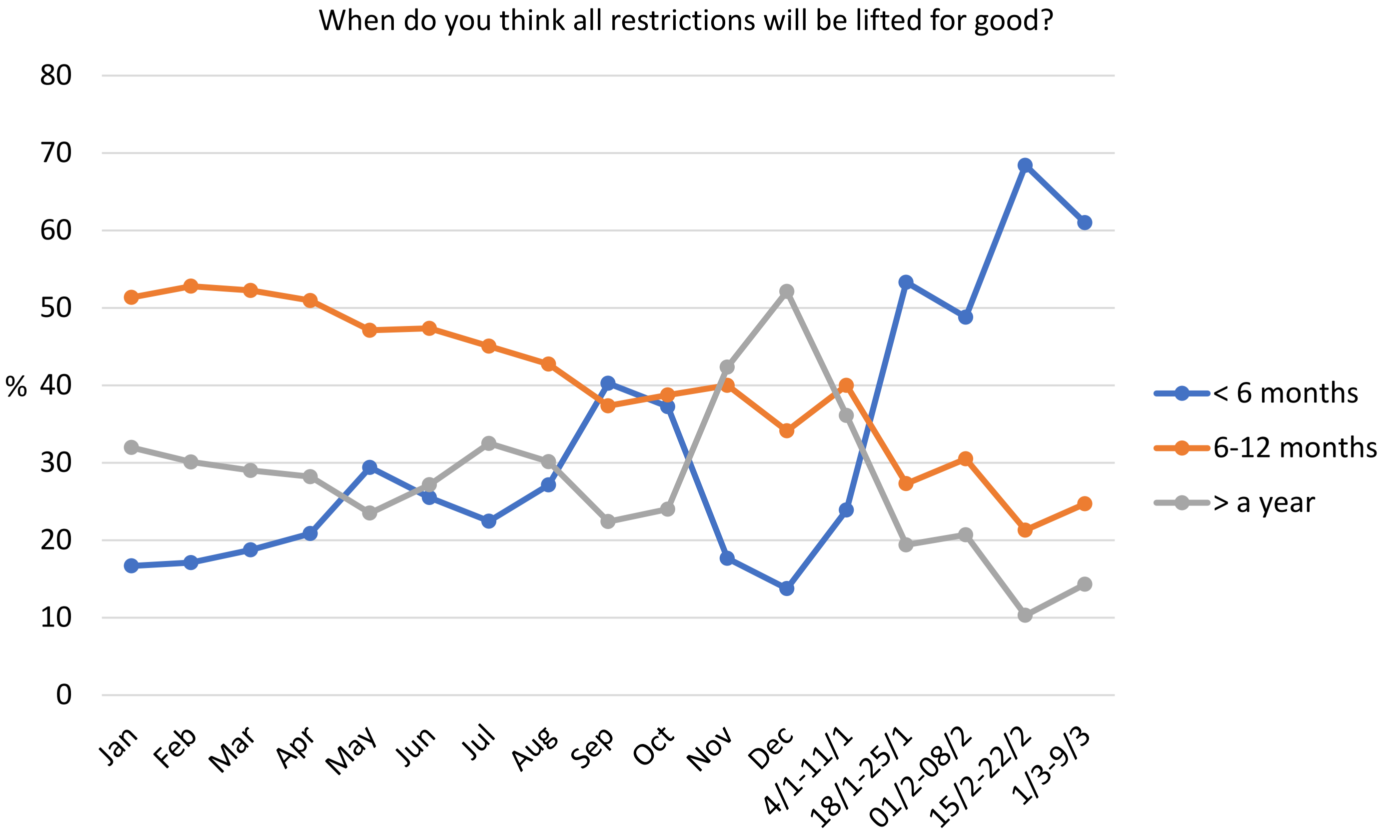
Government Response to the Pandemic



Views on the Government's response to the pandemic are unchanged with the majority viewing it as appropriate.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

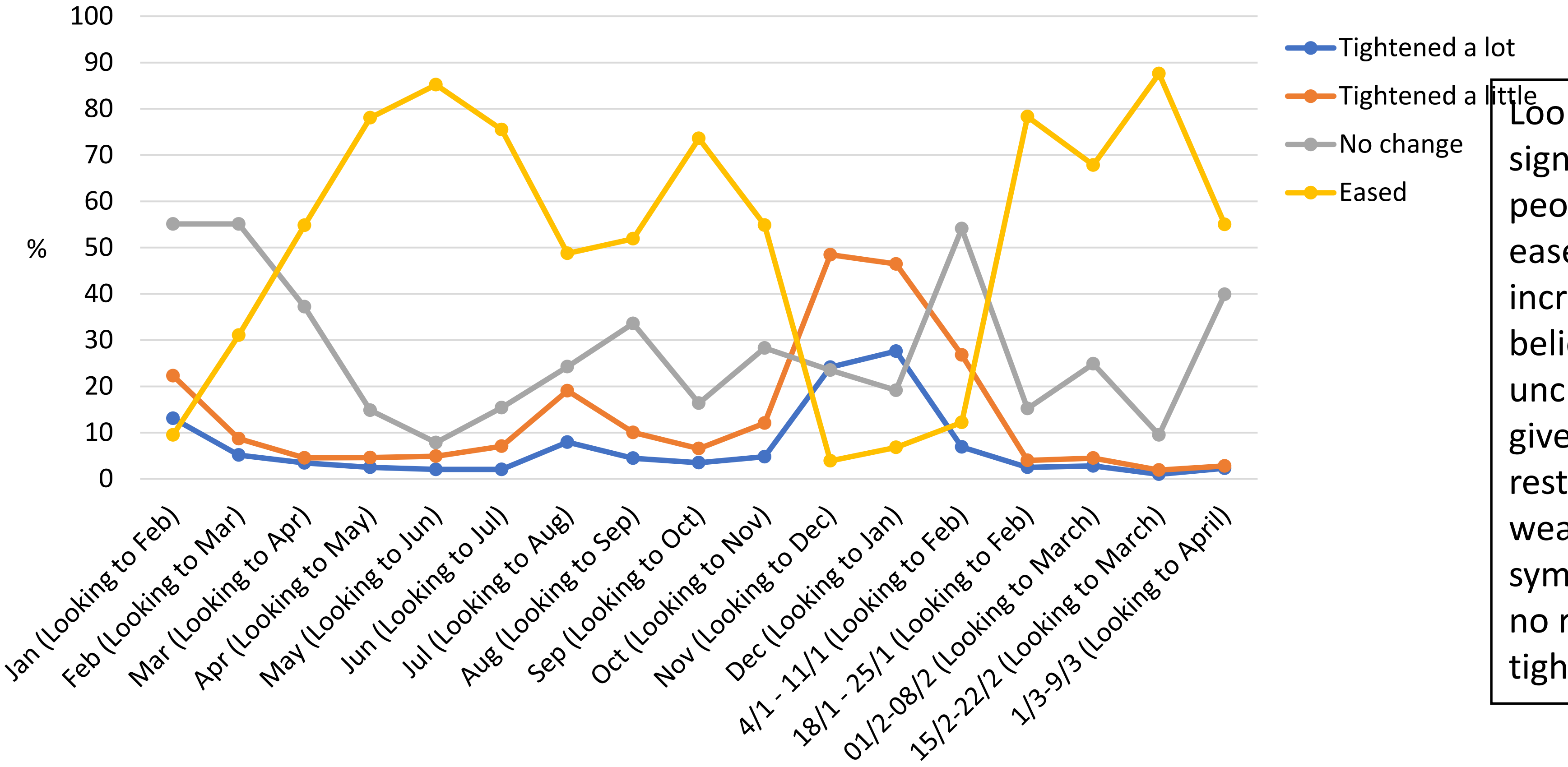
Long-term expectations



Around 60% of people now expect restrictions to be lifted for good within 6 months. This is significantly lower than the previous round of SAM but note that the only remaining restrictions are the requirement to isolate if symptomatic and to wear a mask in healthcare settings.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

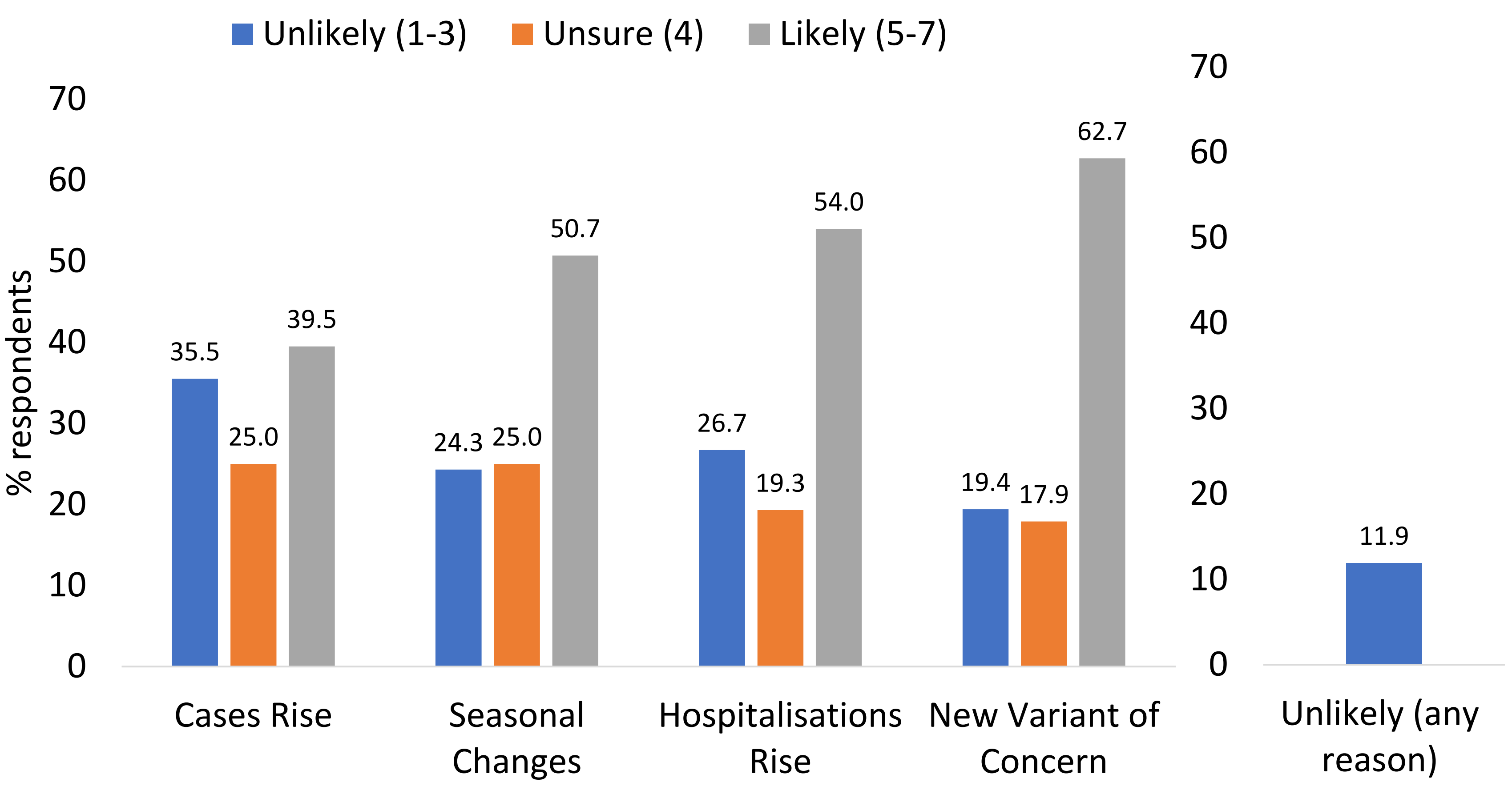
Expectations for easing restrictions (next month)



Looking to April, there was a significant drop in the proportion of people expecting restrictions to ease further, with a corresponding increase in the proportion that believed restrictions would be unchanged – as would be expected given the recent lifting of all restrictions other than mask-wearing in medical facilities and symptomatic self-isolation. Almost no respondents expect any tightening of restrictions in April.

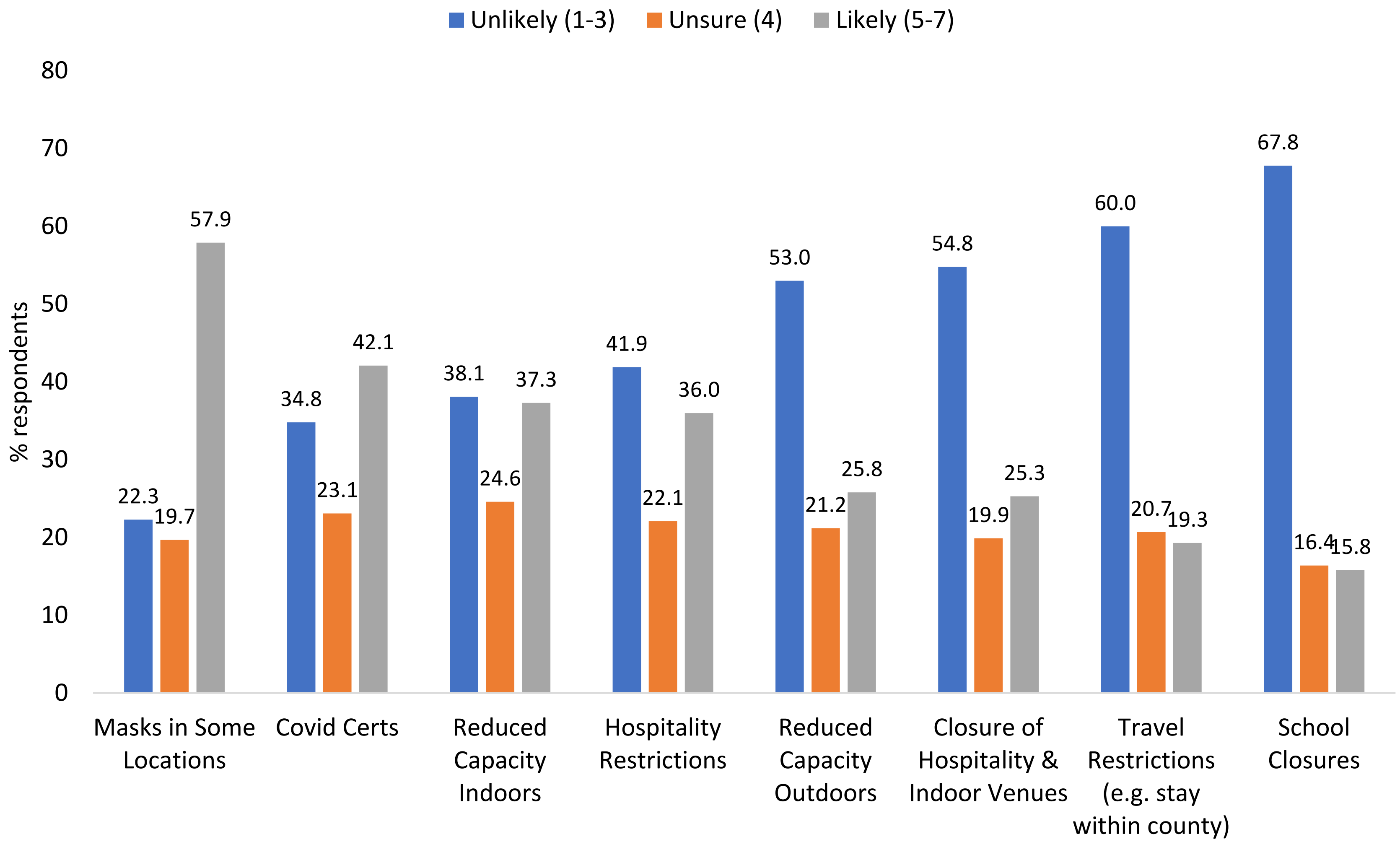
Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

Return of Restrictions



Respondents in this wave of SAM were asked how likely they thought restrictions could be re-imposed for various reasons. A majority believe restrictions could be re-imposed if another variant of concern emerges. Around half of people expect restrictions could be re-imposed if hospitalisations rise or for seasonal changes. A minority expect restrictions to be re-imposed if cases rise. Looking across all reasons, just over one-in-ten people believe restrictions are unlikely for any reason.

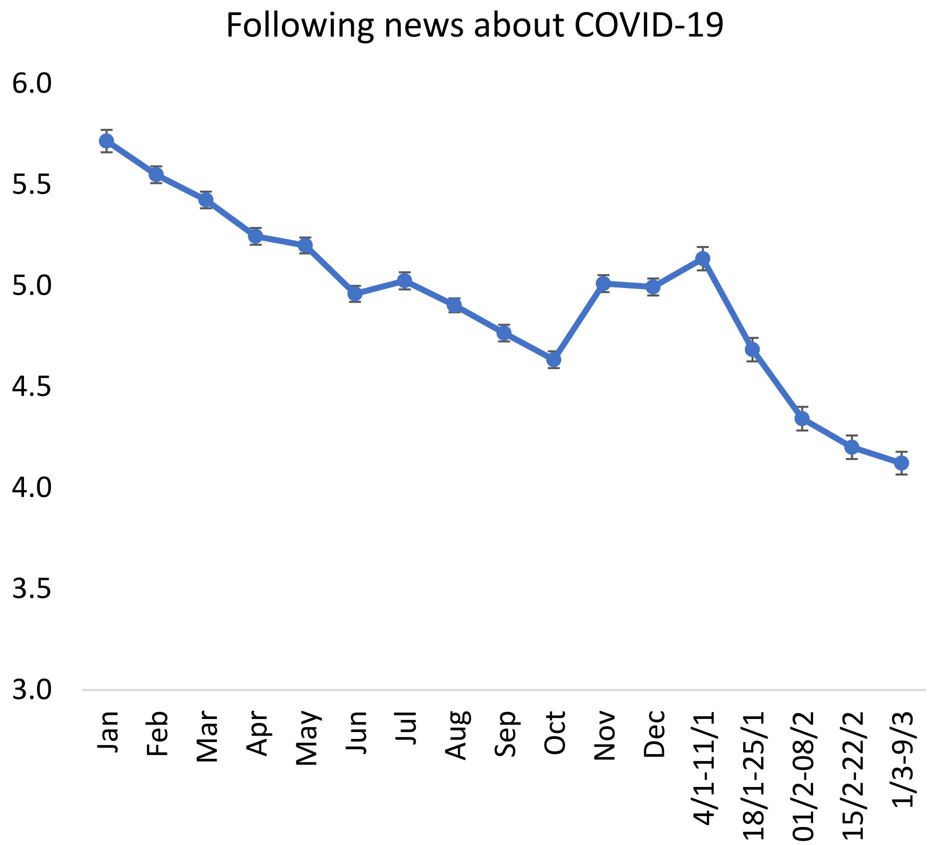
Return of Restrictions



Respondents were also asked about the kinds of restrictions they think could be re-imposed. The only restriction a majority thought likely was the return of a requirement to wear masks in some locations. Responses over the likelihood of hospitality restrictions (incl. Digital Covid Cert checks) and capacity limits in indoor venues were divided.
Most reported that it's unlikely that schools or hospitality will close, there will be reduced capacity at outdoor venues or travel restrictions will be re-imposed.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

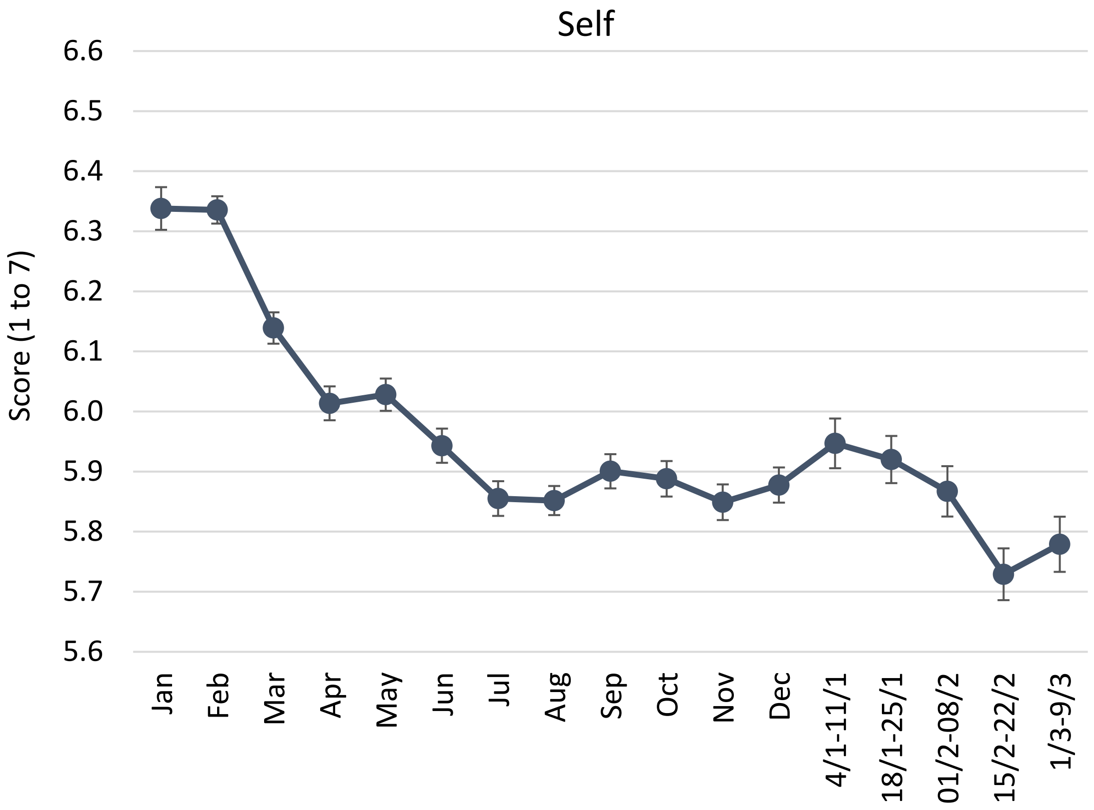
Following coverage

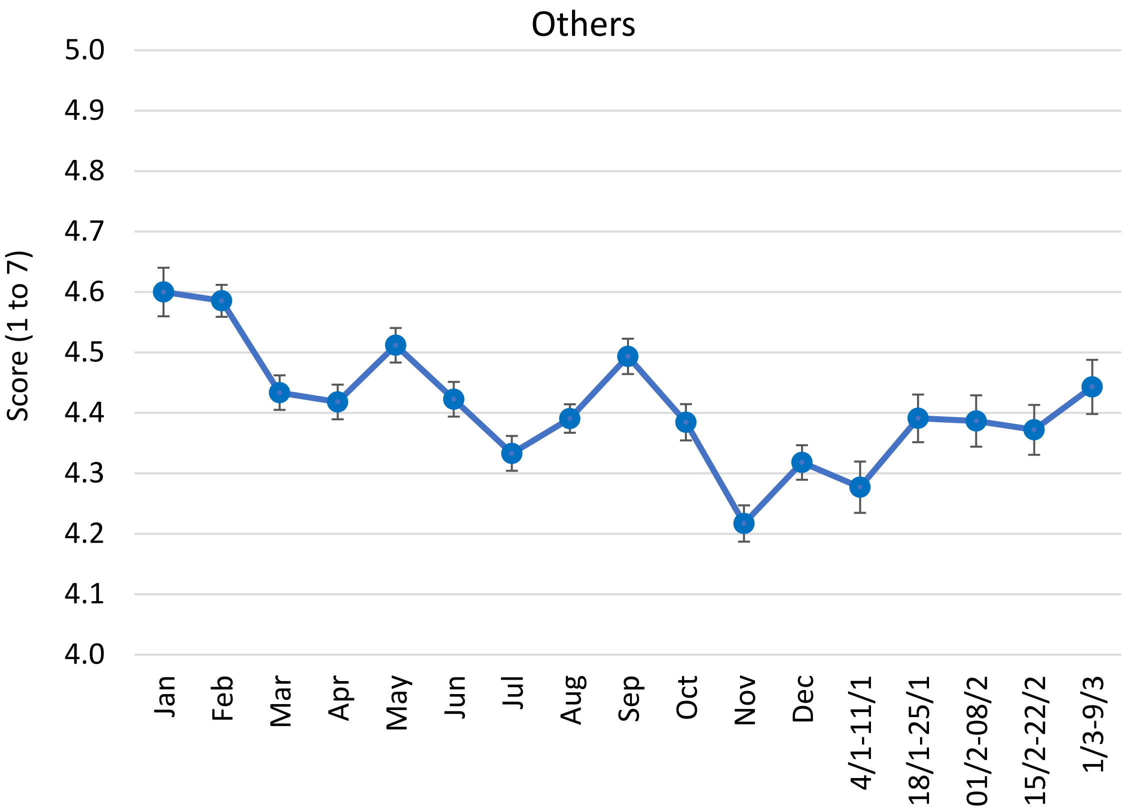


The extent to which people are following the news about COVID-19 is at its lowest levels recorded since SAM started and has declined significantly since early February.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

Self-reported compliance

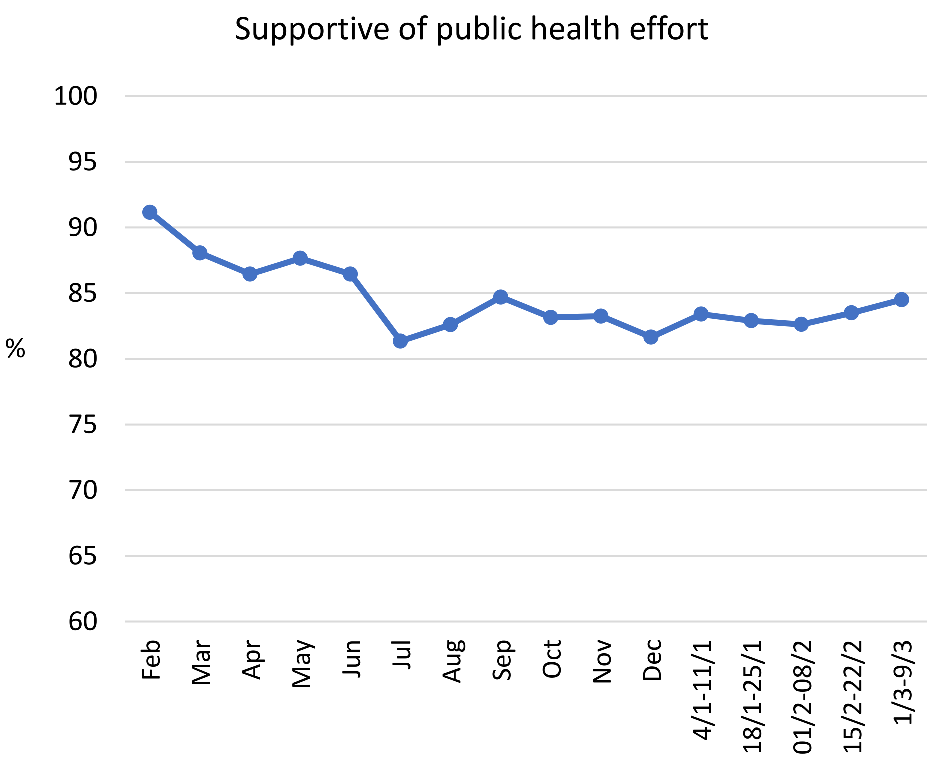


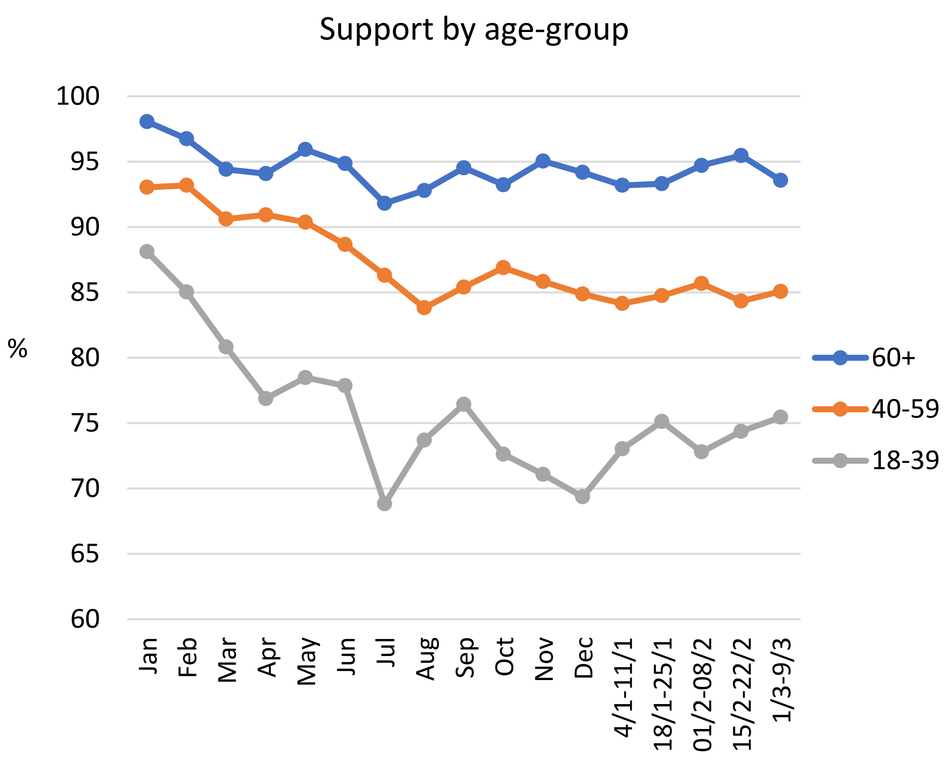


Self-reported compliance with public health guidance and perceived compliance of other people increased slightly compared to previous wave, but the changes were not significant.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

Overall support for the public health effort





Overall support for the public health effort measured across a range of questions has remained stable, with no significant changes within age-groups.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach