

Statistical bulletin

# Coronavirus and how people spent their time under lockdown: 28 March to 26 April 2020

Experimental results of the pilot Office for National Statistics (ONS) online time-use study (collected 28 March to 26 April 2020 across Great Britain) compared with the 2014 to 2015 UK time-use study.

Contact:  
Chris S Payne and Gueorguie  
Vassilev  
economic.wellbeing@ons.gov.uk  
+44 (0)1633651660; +44 (0)1633  
456265

Release date:  
27 May 2020

Next release:  
To be announced

## Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [How the general population spent their time](#)
3. [The gap in unpaid work between men and women](#)
4. [Changes across different income groups](#)
5. [Coronavirus and how people spent their time under lockdown data](#)
6. [Glossary](#)
7. [Measuring the data](#)
8. [Strengths and limitations](#)
9. [Related links](#)

# 1 . Main points

- During lockdown, those with the lowest household incomes increased their total time in paid work, working a similar amount of time outside of the home as they did in 2014 to 2015; this may indicate that those in lower income households are in occupations that cannot be undertaken from home.
- People with the highest household incomes continued to work the same amount on average, as they made a greater switch towards homeworking time.
- There was a substantial reduction in the amount of time we spent travelling, compared with 2014 to 2015; this was less pronounced for people in households with lower incomes, who saw a smaller increase in time spent on a range of leisure activities when compared with households with higher incomes.
- The gap in unpaid work (activities such as childcare, adult care, housework and volunteering) between men and women reduced slightly during lockdown but remained large, at 1 hour and 7 minutes a day; this was a result of women reducing time spent doing unpaid work by 20 minutes a day, while men increased their time on this activity by 22 minutes.
- People with children in the household spent 35% more time on average providing childcare during lockdown than five years ago, although this varied considerably depending on the age of children; the introduction of restrictions coincided with those aged over 60 years reducing the time spent providing childcare by 90%, which equated to 1 hour and 44 minutes a week.

## 2 . How the general population spent their time

### Figure 1: We are spending less time on travelling and work and more on free time, gardening and DIY, and sleep and rest

Minutes of main activity a day for adults aged 18 years and over, 2014 to 2015 for the UK and 28 March to 26 April 2020 for Great Britain

#### Notes:

1. The categories are defined in the [Glossary](#) section.
2. Only things that people refer to as their main activity at any given point are shown in this figure.

#### [Data download](#)

Recent lockdown measures coincided with a substantial reduction in the amount of time we spent travelling, with the average adult spending 1 hour and 6 minutes less a day either commuting or using transport in general. The reduction in travel time was greater for those in paid employment, at 1 hour and 19 minutes a day, with those living in households with higher incomes making more substantial time savings than those on lower incomes.

Across the general adult population, there was an increase in the time spent on entertainment, socialising and other free time by 44 minutes a day. By far the most popular activity in this broad category was watching TV or streaming videos, which took up 2 hours and 53 minutes a day on average. Other activities in this category were far less popular: we spent 28 minutes a day reading, 26 minutes playing games (including computer games), and 16 minutes a day contacting friends and family via phone or messaging services. In our [Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain: 14 May 2020 release](#), 71.3% of those aged 16 years and over reported watching films or using streaming services to cope with lockdown, while 78.7% said that staying in touch with friends and family remotely was also helping.

There was also a substantial increase in the time spent gardening and doing DIY by 147% to 39 minutes a day, and on average we spent an extra 18 minutes sleeping or resting.

During lockdown, there was also a fall of 1 hour and 24 minutes a week in the time spent eating, drinking and engaging in activities such as getting ready to go out; going to cafés, pubs, restaurants; and getting a haircut. During lockdown, we spent 1 hour and 23 minutes a day eating and drinking, which includes eating takeaway food and drinking alcohol, and just under an hour a day cooking or doing the washing up.

#### More about coronavirus

- Find the latest on [coronavirus \(COVID-19\) in the UK](#).
- All ONS analysis, summarised in our [coronavirus roundup](#).
- View [all coronavirus data](#).
- Find out how our studies and surveys are [serving public need](#).

## 3 . The gap in unpaid work between men and women

### Figure 2: The gap in unpaid work between men and women remains large at over an hour per day

Minutes of main activity a day by sex for adults aged 18 years and over, 2014 to 2015 for the UK and 28 March to 26 April 2020 for Great Britain

#### Notes:

1. The categories are defined in the [Glossary](#) section.
2. Only things that people refer to as their main activity at any given point are shown in this figure.
3. Some categories are not shown in this figure but can be found in the reference tables.

#### [Data download](#)

Before lockdown, the gap in unpaid work between men and women – which includes unpaid childcare and other unpaid work such as housework and volunteering – was 1 hour and 50 minutes a day, with men instead spending more time engaging in paid work and travel.

Compared to 2014 to 2015, men reduced their work and travel time by 1 hour and 37 minutes a day on average during lockdown, while for women this reduced by 1 hour and 2 minutes. The time spent doing unpaid work rose by 22 minutes for men and fell by 20 minutes for women and, taken together, these effects reduced the 1 hour and 50 minute gap in unpaid work to 1 hour and 7 minutes a day.

For parents and other adults responsible for young people, unpaid childcare accounts for a substantial amount of unpaid work. The effect of shielding and social distancing coincided with those aged 60 years and over reducing the time spent providing childcare by 90%; this equated to 1 hour and 44 minutes less a week on average, with the vast majority of the decrease attributable to older women. Similarly, those without children reduced their childcare by an average of 1 hour and 13 minutes a week – perhaps reflecting the effect of friends and extended family being unable to provide support to parents.

This meant that individuals living with children spent 35% longer on average providing childcare, which included helping out with homework. Men increased their amount of childcare by 58% between 2014 to 2015 and March to April 2020, but they still undertook 15 minutes a day less unpaid childcare than women. However, any change in this category greatly depended on the age of the child: the amount of time spent caring for a child aged under 8 years in the household was 4 hours and 5 minutes for women and 2 hours 50 minutes for men.

Women increased their paid homeworking time and decreased their paid work time away from home by the same amounts between 2014 to 2015 and March to April 2020. This meant the overall paid work time for women remained the same. Considering both the changes in paid and unpaid work, the gap in entertainment, socialising and other free time between men and women reduced from 29 minutes to 7 minutes per day in March to April 2020.

## 4 . Changes across different income groups

### Figure 3: Those on monthly household incomes up to £1,700 were more likely to work away from home and had no more free time than in 2014 to 2015

Difference in minutes of main activity a day by net household income group for adults aged 18 years and over, 2014 to 2015 for the UK and 28 March to 26 April 2020 for Great Britain

#### Notes:

1. The categories are defined in the [Glossary](#) section.
2. Only things that people refer to as their main activity at any given point are shown in this figure.

#### [Data download](#)

In 2014 to 2015, adults living in households on lower incomes spent less time working from home, and this was also the case during lockdown. Those with a household income up to £1,700 a month increased their average time working from home by 3 hours and 2 minutes a week, while for those earning over £3,301 it increased by 7 hours and 37 minutes a week. This resulted in a much smaller reduction in the total time spent travelling and working compared with those on higher incomes.

Key workers are more likely to have to continue going in to work, and as reported in our [Coronavirus and keyworkers in the UK release](#) 30.5% of employees in the bottom three income deciles (earning up to £1,450 per month) were considered as key workers, while for those in the top three income deciles (earning over £3,250 per month) only 26.4% were considered key workers. Additionally, from our latest [Household income inequality release](#), a larger proportion of households at the bottom of the income distribution are supported by a self-employed individual, who would not be eligible for the furlough scheme and may be less likely to stop work.

Those living in households with middle incomes (between £15,000 and £30,000) were most likely to have been furloughed, with 15% of them reporting so by the 10 days ending 20 April 2020, according to the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN). In contrast, 5% of those with a household income up to £15,000 and 6% of those with incomes above £30,000 had reported being furloughed up to that same period.

As travel and paid working time fell less for those with lower household incomes, this group only saw a small change to their entertainment, socialising and other free time – compared with a rise of just under 50 minutes a day for those on higher incomes. Those on higher incomes also saw a greater rise in time spent sleeping and resting as well as gardening and DIY. There were also differences in exercise time both before and after the lockdown, with the average duration of an exercise session similar across income groups, but those on higher incomes exercised more frequently during the week.

## 5 . Coronavirus and how people spent their time under lockdown data

[Coronavirus and how people spent their time under lockdown](#)

Dataset | Released 27 May 2020

Experimental results of the pilot Office for National Statistics (ONS) online time-use study (collected 28 March to 26 April 2020 across Great Britain) compared with the 2014 to 2015 UK time-use study.

## 6 . Glossary

### Travelling and transport (for example, walking and driving)

Travelling and transport includes travelling to and from locations, escorting others, or being escorted yourself, including by taxi or bus, for example.

### Working away from home

Working away from home includes working in locations outside of the home, such as undertaking delivery or taxi activities.

### Working from home

Working from home includes working either from home or cafés and selling things online or showing people around your home to sell it.

### Total paid work

Total paid work is a combination of working away from home and working from home.

### Study

Study includes taking formal courses with university, college or school, for example, or taking courses for fun. This also includes time doing homework or home study.

## **Keep fit**

Running, jogging, team sports, fitness classes, walking for exercise, dancing, swimming or other intensive solo exercises are all included as activities for keeping fit.

## **Unpaid childcare**

Unpaid childcare includes unpaid feeding, washing, dressing or preparing meals for children; reading to children, playing with children or helping children with homework (or homeschooling); and supporting, comforting or cuddling children.

## **Other unpaid work (excluding travel and childcare)**

Other activities you could contract out under normal circumstances but you do for yourself or others for free are all included as other unpaid work. This includes things like cleaning the house, ironing, adult care, making meals, or volunteering either for or through an organisation.

For this analysis, some of the activities that would normally be classed as unpaid work are shown separately, but we will be analysing unpaid work more completely in future releases.

## **Personal care (including eating and drinking)**

Personal care includes eating and time spent getting washed, dressed, using the bathroom or getting ready to go out.

## **Entertainment, socialising or other free time**

Time left over once all the other activities are counted is what we mean by entertainment, socialising or other free time. Other free time may include watching TV, playing games, listening to music, engaging in social or cultural events or meetings, work breaks, or spending time talking to others.

## **Other**

Other includes time spent completing their time-use diary or where data are missing or illegible.

## **Household income**

This includes the net monthly income of all household members from all sources, after tax and deductions.

# **7 . Measuring the data**

## How we measure time in this release

Time is taken from the two most recent time-use studies in the UK: the 2014 to 2015 UK time-use study covering the UK and the 2020 Office for National Statistics (ONS) online time-use study covering Great Britain. The 2020 study was carried out exclusively for adults aged 18 years and over under coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions (between 28 March and 26 April) and can be used to understand the likely impact of the coronavirus pandemic and associated restrictions on what people in Great Britain are doing with their time.

The 2014 to 2015 study shows what people did with their time before the coronavirus pandemic; however, it is important to recognise that changes between the two studies could be unrelated to the coronavirus pandemic and instead reflect longer term changes in society.

The measures of time in this bulletin are made up of activities that have been recorded by respondents in a time-diary study. Respondents can record doing more than one activity at a time, but for comparability activities that respondents regarded as their main activity were used here.

Throughout the bulletin, time is reported in average minutes per day and week. These averages are useful as they give a good indication of a group's time taken up by a type of activity, but it should be recognised that this average will include people that do not engage in certain types of activities on a given day. Therefore, it should not be confused with the average amount of time taken to do an activity, as there are differences between the two definitions.

## Types of activities in this report

To report on changes in how people use their time in this report, a range of time categories have been defined. For more information on these, with the exception of gardening and DIY and sleep or rest, please see [Section 6: Glossary](#).

## Feedback and future publications

Your feedback will be very valuable in making our results useful and accessible. If you have any questions, please email [economic.wellbeing@ons.gov.uk](mailto:economic.wellbeing@ons.gov.uk).

## 8 . Strengths and limitations

Please note that any changes mentioned in this publication are [statistically significant](#) to the p is less than 0.05 level and that they have been based on unrounded data.

## 9 . Related links

### [Household satellite account, UK: 2015 and 2016](#)

Article | Released 2 October 2018

Measures the value of adult and childcare, household housing services, nutrition, clothing and laundry, transport, and volunteering.

### [Brits spend 29% of their leisure time alone](#)

Article | Released 22 June 2018

The Great Get Together, inspired by Jo Cox, aimed to bring people across the UK together. ONS analysis shows that we spend most of our free time with others but 100 minutes of our free time alone every day.

### [Men enjoy five hours more leisure time per week than women](#)

Article | Released 9 January 2018

Men in the UK enjoy nearly five more hours of leisure time per week than women, Office for National Statistics (ONS) analysis reveals.

### [Young people spend a third of their leisure time on devices](#)

Article | Released 19 December 2017

Is technology making us less sociable? A look at how technology has influenced our leisure time.

### [Leisure time in the UK: 2015](#)

Article | Released 24 October 2017

How much leisure time people in the UK take and how that differs according to various aspects such as age or gender. This analysis gives an insight into the nation's work--life balance and how much people enjoy their leisure time.

### [Changes in the value and division of unpaid volunteering in the UK: 2000 to 2015](#)

Article | Released 16 March 2017

Analysis of changes in participation and time spent volunteering in the UK and estimates of the monetary value of formal volunteering, based on the Community Life Survey (CLS) and time-use surveys.

### [Changes in the value and division of unpaid care work in the UK: 2000 to 2015](#)

Article | Released 10 November 2016

Estimates of the value of unpaid household services in the Household Satellite Account. This is the first in a series of releases that examined the value and division of unpaid household work using time-use data. This release presented estimates of the amount and value of informal child and adult care with analyses by sociodemographic variables including sex, age and labour market status.

### [Women shoulder the responsibility of "unpaid work"](#)

Article | Released 10 November 2016

Analysis of unpaid work, broken down by sex.

### [ONS Time Use Study](#)

Web page

The ONS Time Use Study is a study that aims to find out how different people across England, Scotland and Wales spend their time. Understanding how people spend their time can help to improve services and guide policies that affect people like you.

### [Centre for Time Use Research \(CTUR\)](#)

Web page

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Centre for Time Use Research (CTUR) is a world-leading, multidisciplinary research group based at the University College London (UCL) Institute of Education. The team of researchers – which includes sociologists, economists and demographers – work with time-use data to investigate issues in areas including social life, work-life balance, family, gender and economics.