

Chronicle of unannounced crises

From the health crisis
to the crisis of confidence
in public transportation



The health crisis of 2020 marks a lasting break in collective representations: it divides history into two periods, with an idealized “before Covid,” perceived as carefree and warm, and an “after Covid” synonymous with instability, mistrust, and economic fragility. What is the situation five years on, in a general context that, beyond this health crisis, is being shaken by a variety of crises (environmental, economic, domestic political, geopolitical)?

To better understand the state of the French people in all their diversity, we went to meet around forty of them, living in large cities and metropolitan areas.

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IMAGINING THE MOBILITY OF TOMORROW

Paradoxically, this troubled period has not caused the French to withdraw completely: everyone says that, on a personal level, they are doing rather well despite a deep pessimism about the general state of the world. However, there has been a shift in individual priorities, with a focus on oneself and one's loved ones, and an increased emphasis on well-being.



“Doing things you want to do and not forcing yourself. Thinking about yourself. Refusing to do things, not forcing yourself to do things out of principle, but just doing them because you want to. To have time to yourself. Thinking about yourself.”

Young person with few qualifications



“Everything became complicated after Covid.”

Single-parent family

The Covid period, a powerful marker

L'avant Covid-19 est une période idéalisée : plus chaleureuse,

The pre-Covid-19 period is idealized: warmer, more collective, and surprisingly, without any particular reference to past crises (yellow vests, etc.). Especially since, with this crisis, the hope for a new and "better" world has not materialized, despite all the promises made. The opportunity to change and reshape the world differently and improve it... has not been seized, causing great disappointment. The Covid crisis has acted as a wake-up call, raising awareness of the fragility of the world, of France, and of the daily lives of those involved.

"I feel like it has been a realization that very serious things can happen in France, whereas before, we felt protected and that it only happened to others. But no, we can be at war, we can suffer from viruses."

TC dropouts

Now, health concerns no longer seem to be a major obstacle (to mobility), but they have still left their mark (changes in transportation habits, reluctance to overcrowding, reduced mobility due to teleworking, etc.). Furthermore, even though there are fewer serious concerns about pandemics, the Covid crisis has heightened tensions around the disease in a collective setting: a "fear" of coughing in enclosed spaces, the application of avoidance/distancing tactics, more frequent use of teleworking in the event of illness, etc.

Inflation: daily life under pressure

The Covid crisis has been replaced by the crisis of inflation and purchasing power (other crises are certainly worrying, but have little or no impact on the daily lives of French people).

In ADEME's annual barometer (Oct. 2024), dedicated to "social representations of climate change," among the priority issues for French people aged "15 and over," purchasing power comes well ahead (26%), showing a significant increase since the health crisis. The environment/ecological transition is cited by only 9% of French people (down since 2019).

"I feel like that's where it all started: inflation, problems. That was the trigger, COVID. Since then, we've had nothing but trouble, but not necessarily related to Covid. It's been a nightmare, lots of things that have nothing to do with it, but since Covid, it's been catastrophic. Before, I think it was easier."

Working people with children

Inflation is now the major crisis, omnipresent and suffocating. Participants lament an economic situation that has become burdensome (decline in purchasing power) and is having a significant impact on their behavior. Unlike the ecological crisis, which is more distant and abstract for many, inflation directly affects daily life, forcing people to economize across the board.

According to an IFOP study conducted in October 2024 on behalf of the Jean Jaurès Foundation, French people are saving less (44% today, compared to 54% in 2010), eat out less (25% never go to restaurants today, compared to 8% in 2010) and go on fewer vacations each year (24% today, compared to 35% in 2010). In Keoscopie surveys (November 2024), around three in ten French people aged 15 and over also said they went to the cinema, bars, and restaurants less often than before the Covid crisis.

Faced with this crisis in purchasing power, a unique strategy is emerging: **"We treat ourselves to small pleasures rather than big trips."** Leisure activities are turning into nature outings, which are free and accessible. **"I cook everything at home. It's good for your health and your budget,"** says one adult without children.

In this context, the contradiction is striking, because despite a drastic reduction in spending, vacations and moments of pleasure remain an absolute priority. For those who work, this means that few people are questioning their current job, for fear of losing out financially. For some, the search for additional income (double jobs, selling and buying second-hand goods, good deals, planning ahead to pay less for their vacations, etc.) guides their lives.



"I cook everything at home. It's good for my health and my budget."

Adult without children

A crisis of confidence

The **Covid crisis** has raised awareness and highlighted our vulnerabilities and dependencies, **accentuating negative aspects that were already present**, such as the fragility of public services and the decline in mutual aid and human contact.

The uncertainty of the world fuels mistrust of the state, the media, and other citizens, accentuating individualism and isolation.

Teleworking exacerbates this feeling: "**I work with voices, I no longer know my colleagues**," laments one worker. While teleworking is appreciated for the time it saves, it is paradoxically a source of isolation, loss of information, and even loss of self-esteem.

Individual priorities are exacerbated by the context, particularly the economic context, which requires even greater attention and **focus on the essentials**. This decline in sociability was initiated by the health crisis and the associated restrictions on mobility (disuse), amplified by a tighter budget (inflation).

However, these individual priorities are not expressed in the same way for everyone: some turn to isolation from the outside world (by closing themselves off in their bubble or making less effort towards others); others, on the contrary, seek greater openness to the world by getting involved, recreating connections, and enjoying every moment.



"Personally, I see fewer people, I go out less. Going out on the town for a drink with friends doesn't happen anymore."

Adult without children

"When a date is canceled, you think to yourself, 'Good riddance,' and end up on Netflix!"

Adult without children

The French are thus caught in an identity paradox. There is a strong disconnect between feelings of individual happiness and a pessimistic view of the state of the world and of France: valuing their personal well-being while observing the deterioration of collective well-being. "**We are optimistic individually, but pessimistic collectively**," summarizes a family with children.

Mental and physical health: the revenge of well-being

The pandemic has led to greater awareness of personal vulnerabilities, prompting people to invest more in their physical and mental health. "**I've been doing a lot more sport since Covid. I've discovered swimming, it's great**," says one worker. This focus on physical well-being has been accompanied by a renewed interest in the home: "**I have more plants at home, I feel better there**," explains a young person with few qualifications.

In a survey conducted by the Terram Institute and Keolis in 2025, two-thirds of French people (67%) said they had already experienced a period of intense stress or anxiety. In this context, active mobility appears to be a lever for psychological well-being: 73% of people who walk regularly say they enjoy it more than using the car, and 71% believe it reduces their stress. Furthermore, among those who combine active mobility with public transport, 76% believe that it has a positive impact on their mental health.

Public transport therefore has a role to play in reducing travel-related stress.

In a survey conducted by Keolis on the perceived benefits of express buses (2024), 55% of respondents said that express buses had the advantage of reducing driving-related stress.



But public transport is unpopular

Since the health crisis, public transport has been at the center of a silent crisis: crowds have become less tolerable, even unbearable, there is less acceptance of overcrowding, hygiene has become an obsession, and insecurity is a growing concern. **"I don't take the tram anymore, the smell is unbearable,"** says one user.

"I do my shopping in the evening to avoid when it's too crowded, because it's a waste of time and it's uncomfortable: you're there, trampling on people, stuck together, you can't breathe properly..."

Public transport dropouts

In a Keoscope survey (on mobility during the Covid period), conducted in December 2023, one third of respondents said they "regularly avoid crowded places (such as train stations and transport hubs)". Similarly, a quarter of respondents said they "regularly change their activity schedules to avoid crowds."

This rejection is amplified by inflation, which is prompting users to question **public transport fares, perceived as expensive** compared to private cars, which paradoxically remain largely unquestioned in terms of their real costs.

However, in another major paradox, public transport remains attractive and competitive for trips to and from city centers, where cars are synonymous with congestion and stress. **"I always take public transport when I go to Lille,"** explains a young worker with few qualifications.

Given the difficulties of accessing city centers by car (parking difficulties, congestion, etc.), a decision may therefore be made in favor of public transportation. This rational choice contrasts sharply with a deep emotional rejection of public transportation.



"I do my shopping in the evening to avoid when it's too crowded, because it's a waste of time and it's uncomfortable: you're there, trampling on each other, stuck together, unable to breathe properly..."

TC dropouts



Transportation in the face of the crisis of expectations

Public transportation must meet paradoxical expectations: guaranteeing comfort and safety while remaining economical and environmentally friendly.

The solution will necessarily involve a tailored offering that is less congested and more hygienic. The continued attractiveness of the offering, even if it is not heavily used on a day-to-day basis, seems to be a relevant response to current expectations.

This is especially true given that isolation, the search for protection, and avoidance of others are prompting some citizens to turn away from public transportation in favor of their cars (individual bubbles) and bicycles (particularly for their health benefits).



In summary, the current crises reveal a French society marked by stark paradoxes: it aspires to a better quality of life, while feeling oppressed by economic constraints; it rejects the collective, while sometimes finding refuge in it.

Despite a pessimistic view of the state of the world and France, French people, on a personal level, say they are doing well, with one strong idea emerging: **"Refusing to suffer even more than they already did before."**

Understanding these contradictions is essential to rethinking collective mobility, which will need to be more personalized, more flexible, and always reassuring.