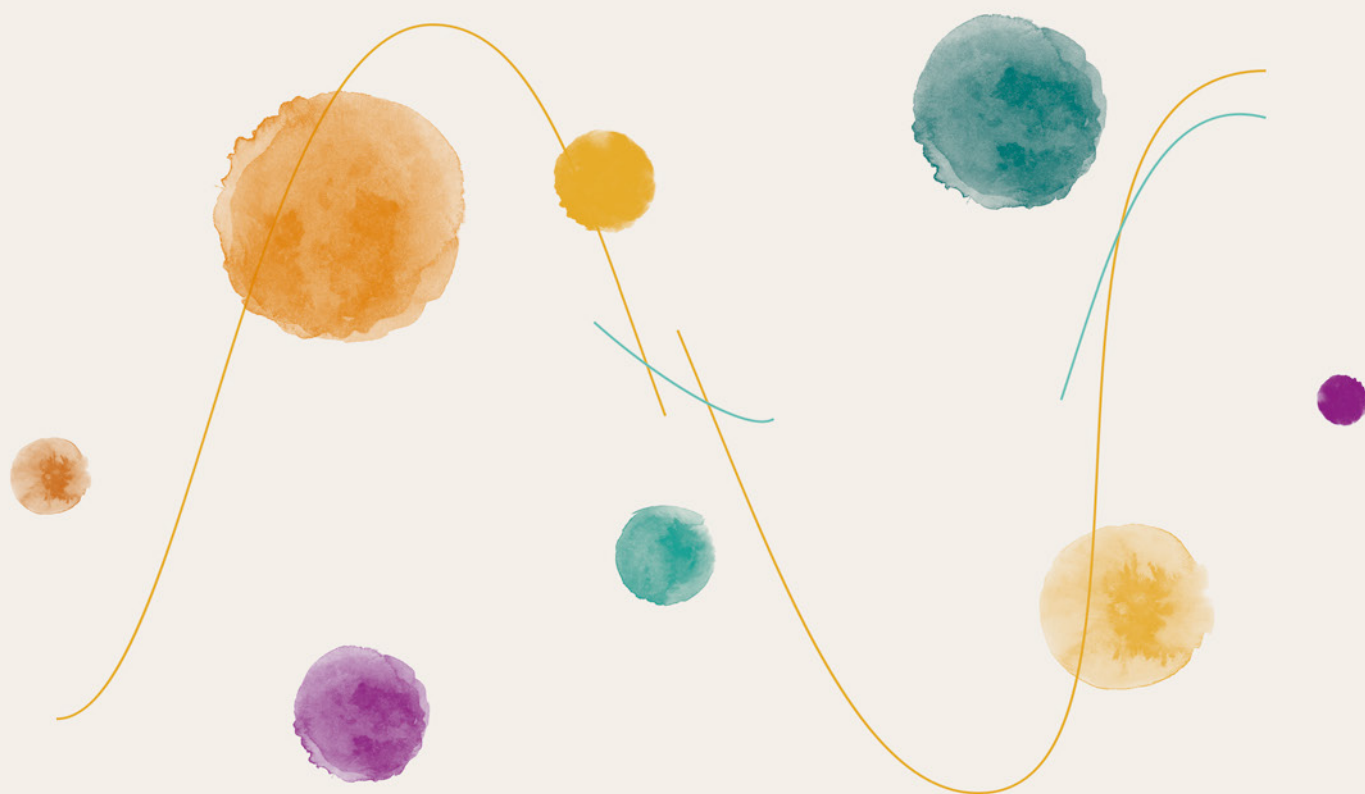


# SOLITUDES 2024

## WHEN LONELINESS STRIKES

*Weak social connections withstanding the test of time*



## SUMMARY

**Hadrien RIFFAUT** (head of research) – CERLIS

**Séverine DESSAJAN** – CERLIS and **Delphine SAURIER** – AUDENCIA

In cooperation with **Solen BERHUET** and **Sandra HOIBIAN** – CRÉDOC



The 2024 edition focuses on **when loneliness strikes**, and is the result of diverse observational methods and scales that measure the social condition. The data presented in this study was obtained from a dual qualitative and quantitative approach involving over 3,000 individuals living in France, who responded to a **statistical survey** conducted by Crédoc (research centre for the study and observation of living conditions) in July 2024. A simultaneous **ethnographic survey** was led by a team of researchers, sociologists and anthropologists among lonely and isolated individuals, with or without assistance from a community organisation, and among social workers. Three main categories of respondents are represented in this survey: the general population (Credoc survey); professionals and volunteers from non-profit organisations, community centres, safe homes and neighbourhood associations that work to combat isolation; and lonely and isolated individuals. The ethnographic survey covered **urban, suburban, and rural areas across France, in the following regions: Île-de-France, Nouvelle Aquitaine, Brittany and Pays de la Loire**. The results presented in this study are the product of a **cross-referenced analysis of the various approaches**.

**1** Isolation describes a state in which an individual is physically cut off from others, and refers to the scarcity of the individual's interactions in various social spheres, such as employment, family, friendships, professional or community ties.

**2** Loneliness refers to an emotional state, which occurs when an individual feels alone. It describes a subjective experience that is defined differently from isolation.

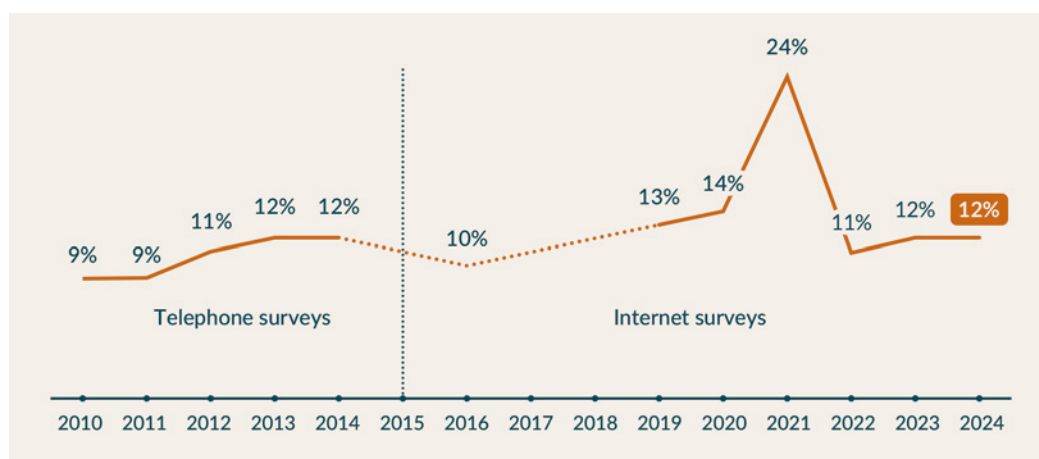
## A few key figures on loneliness and social isolation in France in 2024

### Levels of isolation that show no signs of abating...

The percentage of isolated individuals<sup>1</sup> did not subside over the 2023-2024 period, remaining at 12% of the population (Figure 1). Behind these stable figures, however, hide **what is still a high level of loneliness<sup>2</sup>**, affecting close to a quarter of respondents even today (Figure 2).

**Figure 1**  
Change in the percentage of isolated individuals in France since 2010

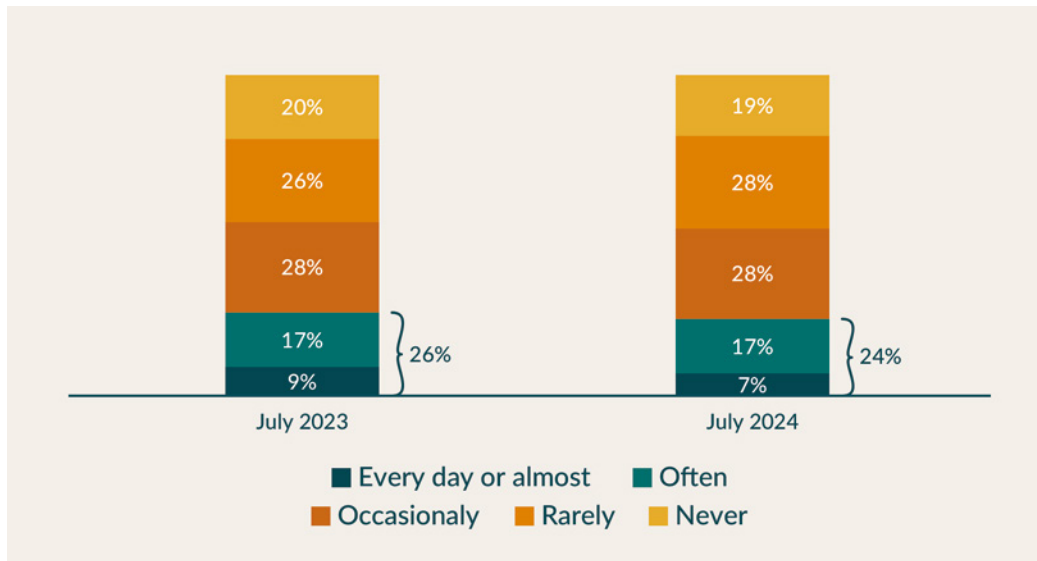
Sources: Institut TMO Regions from 2010 to 2014 and Crédoc from 2016 to 2024 as part of the Conditions De vie et Aspirations (Living conditions and expectations) survey  
Scope: individuals aged 18 and above between 2010 and 2014, and individuals aged 15 and above between 2016 and 2024  
Commentary: In 2024, 12% of the population living in France was socially isolated.



### ...and which continue to affect the most vulnerable sections of the population

**Individuals with the lowest income levels are also those who suffer the most from social isolation.** In 2024, 17% of individuals in the lowest income group were isolated, compared to only 7% of high-income individuals. The most socially isolated categories are the unemployed (26% of whom are isolated), homemakers (20% of them) and manual workers (16% of them).

## Feelings of loneliness that remain high



**Figure 2**  
Do you ever feel lonely?

Source: Crédoc, Conditions De vie et Aspirations (Living conditions and expectations) surveys, July 2023 and 2024  
Scope: all individuals aged 15 and above  
Commentary: in July 2024, 7% of the population felt lonely «every day or almost».

In July 2024, close to a quarter of respondents reported regularly feeling lonely (Figure 2). Such feelings cause suffering to those who experience them. In July 2024, 24% of individuals who felt lonely reported *suffering a lot* from feelings of loneliness and 57% reported *suffering a bit* from them (a 6-point increase from July 2023).

## How do loneliness and isolation vary over time, moments in time and stages in life?

### Loneliness and isolation withstanding cyclical time and social time

To analyse loneliness through the lens of time, there is the need to explore the major physical and social events that create patterns in our lives, and which are capable of shaping them. Loneliness can be influenced by seasonal variations:

- **Loneliness is more strongly felt during the day** (33%) than **at night** (28%). Feelings of loneliness are stronger during the daytime as that is when social activity is more intense. The more vibrant daytime social interactions widen the gap between individuals who are an active part of a social network and those who are not.
- **Individuals who are not part of the workforce** (homemakers and elderly dependents) and unemployed individuals experience more acute loneliness **during the week**. The contrast that they experience, by witnessing the activities - most often professional - in which those around them are involved, heightens the loneliness and isolation that they already feel.
- On the contrary, **individuals who head single-parent households, usually women, are more likely than other groups to report feeling lonely on weekends**. The lower number of adults in the home gives them no other option than to maximise their involvement with their children, thereby reducing opportunities to socialise outside the domestic and parental contexts.
- **Individuals reported feeling more lonely in winter** (38% of respondents reported *often* or *occasionally* feeling lonely in winter) **than summer** (29%). With fewer outdoor activities available in winter, individuals who already tend to be withdrawn are confined

- to their homes, thus increasing their feelings of loneliness during this period of the year.
- **One third of respondents felt lonely during year-end festivities and public holidays.** These collective «rituals», which have set the norm and are structured by well-defined social practices, reveal the divide between those who take part in these festivities and those who have been left out.

## Loneliness and isolation day to day

**Loneliness and isolation are deep-seated experiences that take root over time and in the daily routines of affected individuals.** These experiences are not defined merely by the absence of interactions or feelings of not having any or enough connections. They also refer to an intimate relationship with oneself and to specific initiatives to combat loneliness or minimise its effects. **There is also a very broad spectrum of ways in which loneliness and isolation are expressed.** As they are often silenced or invisibilised, both of these afflictions are hard to evaluate. Firstly, this is because isolated individuals are, by definition, withdrawn from the world, not easy to reach and often not particularly vocal about the way they live, perceive and feel about these experiences. In addition, the stigma associated with loneliness and isolation may exacerbate shyness and other reasons to avoid opening up. Loneliness and isolation may also be expressed through feelings such as **abandonment, social worthlessness** and in the most extreme cases, **exclusion**. **These feelings** may also be compounded by **boredom** and time that seems to pass more slowly, from which one hopes to escape. They may also feel more intense with time spent **waiting**: a suspension from action, characterised by passiveness and uncertainty, such as waiting for an administrative decision, housing and in the most severe cases, death.

**Loneliness and isolation can also be understood through the activities that form the daily routines of affected individuals.** The three most common activities that individuals engage in when they feel lonely are: *watching television, reading, listening to the radio or playing ; physical activity (sports, walks, meditation) and sleeping*. However, very few of them reach out to community organisations when they are in such a situation (3%). They also turn to digital technologies and social media, in particular, to «*fill passing time*» or to «*occupy a lull*». In some cases, these technologies are also the preferred tools for connecting with others, notably through instant messaging, which makes it possible to keep in touch even from afar.

Many of the respondents described having a **daily routine structured around repetitive, and sometimes even ritualised activities, to give meaning and substance to their existence.** Most of these activities consist of household chores or self-care tasks. These repetitive activities help them to reconnect with themselves, giving structure to their days, and potentially offering them a way out of their inactivity or withdrawal.

## Loneliness and isolation by age and generation

**Loneliness and isolation are not experienced and felt in the same way across ages and generations. Loneliness is felt more strongly among young people (35%).** Part of the reason that this age group is more likely to report experiencing and feeling loneliness is that they are more vocal and uninhibited on the topic than older people (16%). Growing awareness among young people of various mental health issues has also fostered greater acceptance of the phenomenon. Furthermore, young people tend to view loneliness as a transitional phase in their lives.

Isolation, on the other hand, tends to affect older age groups, particularly middle-aged individuals (24%). As this age group typically undergoes transitions (geographical mobility, career switches, changes to working and employment conditions, children moving out of the home, etc.) and major life changes (divorce, separation, retrenchment, illness, etc.), it is more vulnerable than other age groups to weakening social ties. While levels of isolation among seniors appear to be lower than the levels observed for middle-aged individuals, the ways in which their experience is expressed are just as strong. Isolation for them is more likely experienced through sudden separations (loss of loved ones, weakening network of friends and neighbours, and a transition to some form of dependency) that gradually and permanently affect the quality of their social relationships.

## A few findings: time as a key to understanding and taking action to foster social ties

The findings that follow are a cross-referenced synthesis of data that was gathered from social workers and from material provided by respondents who were living alone or isolated. They have resulted in four main observations:

### Raising awareness on loneliness and its everyday signs in order to spot them better

Implement awareness campaigns targeting public opinion, as well as courses to train public interest stakeholders on how to change perceptions and dispel taboos on loneliness and isolation, which are often difficult topics to talk about, so that they can be more easily identified. Looking out for indicators of an individual's lack of social connections, hearing them out and observing their mannerisms, lifestyles and behaviour, are some of the first steps towards recognising the warning signs of isolation and loneliness, thereby preventing or anticipating the need to coordinate the care of individuals who are alone and isolated.

### Encouraging lonely or isolated individuals to be part of a support system

Expressing the need for help in overcoming loneliness or isolation is a major obstacle for many individuals of any age. Shying away from community organisations or other existing support systems, often due to negative labels or the stigma stemming from a lack of social ties, keep individuals who are vulnerable to loneliness and isolation away from the very structures that could help them. Working on representativity and changing mindsets through targeted measures and awareness campaigns can narrow the gap between the available support options and the needs of lonely and/or isolated people.

### Overcoming loneliness and isolation across seasons

A global year-round approach to care is essential, as seasonal variations influence people's relationship with loneliness and isolation. For example, opportunities for socialisation during year-end festivities and various holidays over the year can exacerbate the exclusion of the most isolated people, particularly the most vulnerable among them, thus requiring targeted initiatives to maintain social links. At the same time, the daily cycle also requires special attention, with initiatives such as the extended night-time opening hours of associations and public services, and the introduction of late-night services, to provide an

uninterrupted support network. Targeted measures can also be implemented for specific groups, notably the most invisibilised individuals, such as those living rough and exposed to the elements, and the scarcity in summer of both community organisations and the people who work there, whose schedules could be optimised.

### **Promoting a cross-sector approach that involves public interest stakeholders to effectively combat isolation, loneliness and their consequences**

Cross-sector collaboration may involve the implementation of sustainable mechanisms for dialogue and coordination allowing public authorities, associations and foundations to pool their resources, expertise and knowledge of specific local and demographic contexts. By joining forces and resources, public interest stakeholders may then develop holistic strategies factoring in social, financial and healthcare solutions that are consistent with individual and collective trajectories, thereby guaranteeing a better quality of life for the population across various moments in time.

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