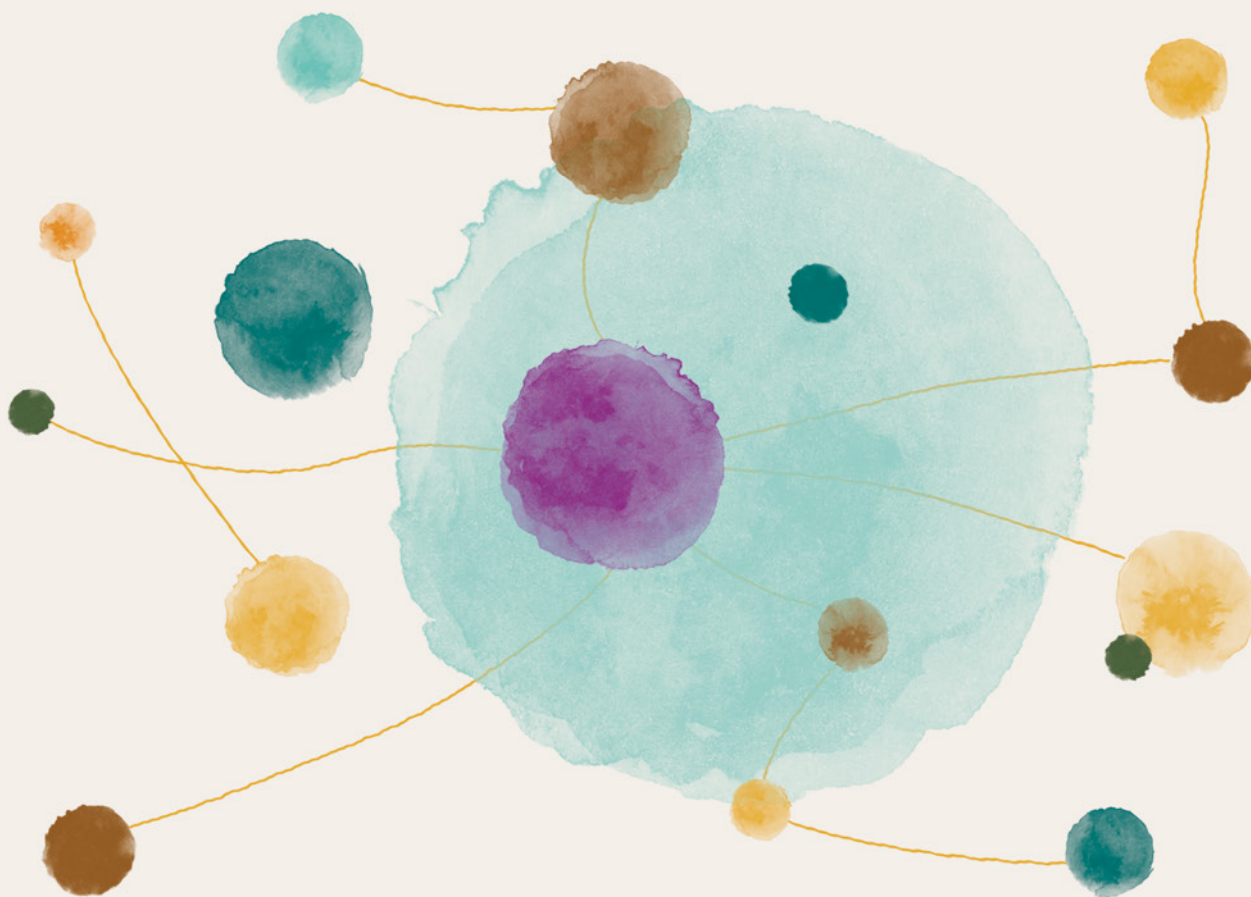


2025 SOLITUDES STUDY

Close ties: the cornerstone of sociability



SUMMARY

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This new edition of the Solitudes study focuses on **close relationships**, using a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods and scales of observation. **A statistical survey** conducted by the Crédoc in July 2025 questioned more than 3,000 people living in France. At the same time, **an ethnographic survey** was conducted by a sociology and anthropology research team among people who are alone or isolated, some of whom are supported by non-profit organisations, as well as among actors involved in the field. The survey covers three main categories of people: the general population, professionals and volunteers involved in the fight against isolation, and people directly exposed to loneliness or isolation. The ethnographic fieldwork was carried out **in France, in rural, urban and peri-urban areas in the Île-de-France, Grand Est and Normandy regions**. All the results presented are based on a **cross-analysis of these different approaches**.

Urban loneliness and rural isolation in France

A higher rate of isolation in rural areas

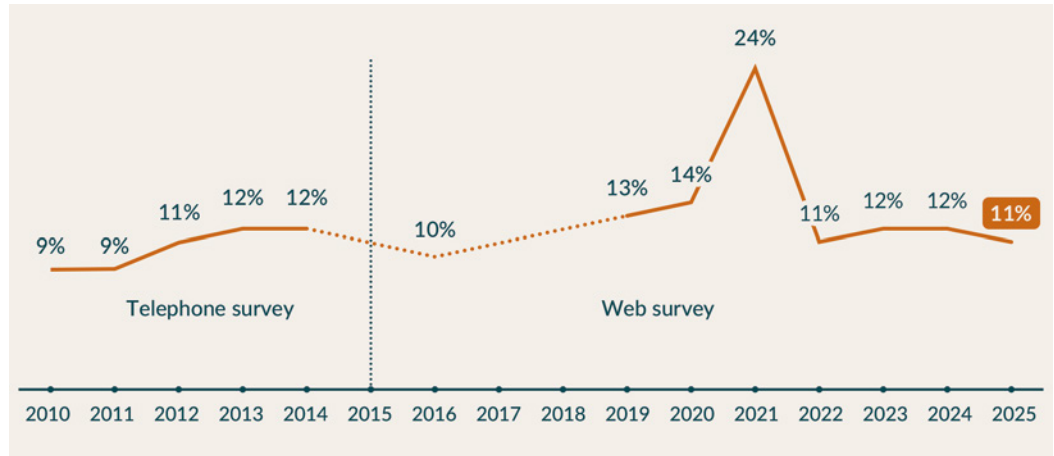
1 Isolation is defined in this study as having no or very few physical encounters with five social networks, in the sense of “sociability networks” (family, friends, professional contacts, neighbours or community groups).

Over the period 2024-2025, the proportion of isolated individuals remained stable, falling only slightly from 12% in July 2024 to 11% in July 2025 (Figure 1). Behind this apparent stability, however, lie significant forms of withdrawal and limited social interaction. When isolated individuals are aggregated with those whose social interactions are limited to a single social network,¹ **nearly one-third of the population (32%) emerges as isolated or close to isolation.**

Figure 1

Change in the proportion of isolated people since 2010

Sources: TMO Regions Institute from 2010 to 2014 and Crédoc from 2016 to 2025 in the Living Conditions and Aspirations survey
 Scope: People aged 18 and over between 2010 and 2014 and people aged 15 and over from 2016 to 2025
 For example: In France, in 2025, 11% of the population is socially isolated

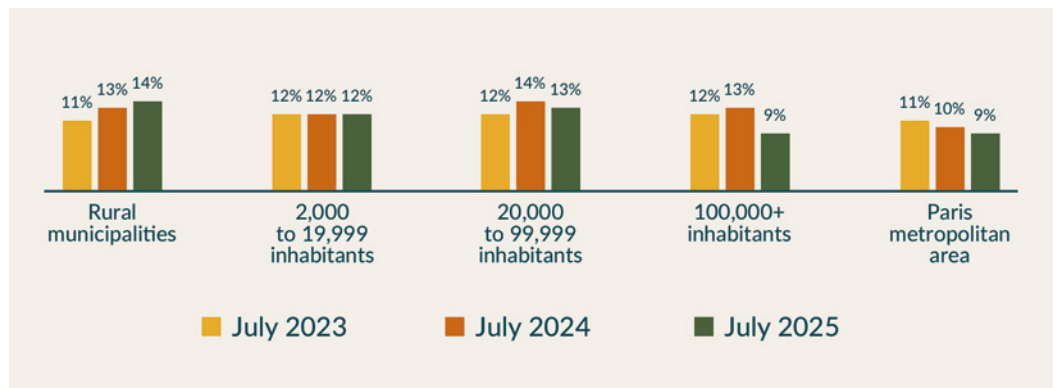


If we look at regional disparities, we see that **isolation is more prevalent in rural areas than in large urban areas.** In July 2025, 14% of people living in rural areas were isolated, compared with 9% of people living in the Paris metropolitan area and in towns with a population of 100,000 or more (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Proportion of isolated individuals by type of urban area

Source: Crédoc, Living Conditions and Aspirations surveys, July 2023, 2024, and 2025
 Scope: All persons aged 15 and over
 For example: In July 2025, 14% of people living in rural municipalities were isolated



A sense of loneliness remains prevalent, particularly in urban areas

While isolation is more pronounced in rural areas, feelings of loneliness appear to be more prevalent in large urban areas. In July 2025, **nearly a quarter of the population (24%) felt lonely** (“every day or almost every day” or “often”). Distinguishing between different categories of urban area, we find that **28% of people living in towns with more than 100,000 inhabitants feel lonely, compared to 21% of people living in rural areas** (Figure 3).

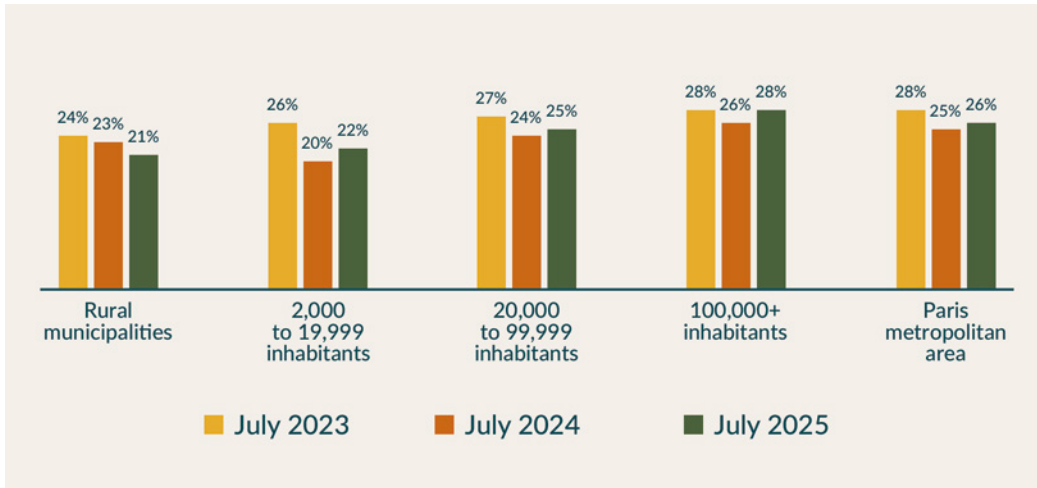


Figure 3
Changes in feelings of loneliness by type of urban area

Source: Crédoc, Living Conditions and Aspirations surveys, July 2023, 2024, and 2025

Scope: All persons aged 15 and over
For example: In July 2025, 28% of residents in municipalities with more than 100,000 inhabitants felt lonely.

Precarity and social isolation: phenomena that always go hand in hand

Year after year, we see a persistent close link between economic insecurity and social isolation. **People with the most modest resources and whose employment status places them in the most precarious strata are always the most exposed to social isolation.** In terms of financial resources, 16% of people with low incomes felt isolated in July 2025, compared with 5% of those with high incomes. In terms of employment status, 20% of unemployed people were socially isolated, compared with 9% of those who work (Figure 4).

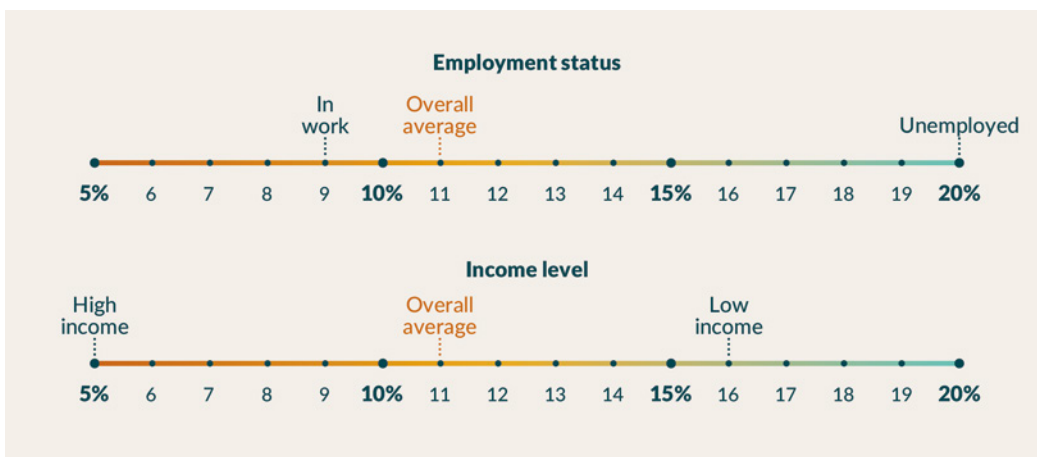


Figure 4
Proportion of isolated individuals by income and employment status

Source: Crédoc, Living Conditions and Aspirations surveys, July 2025

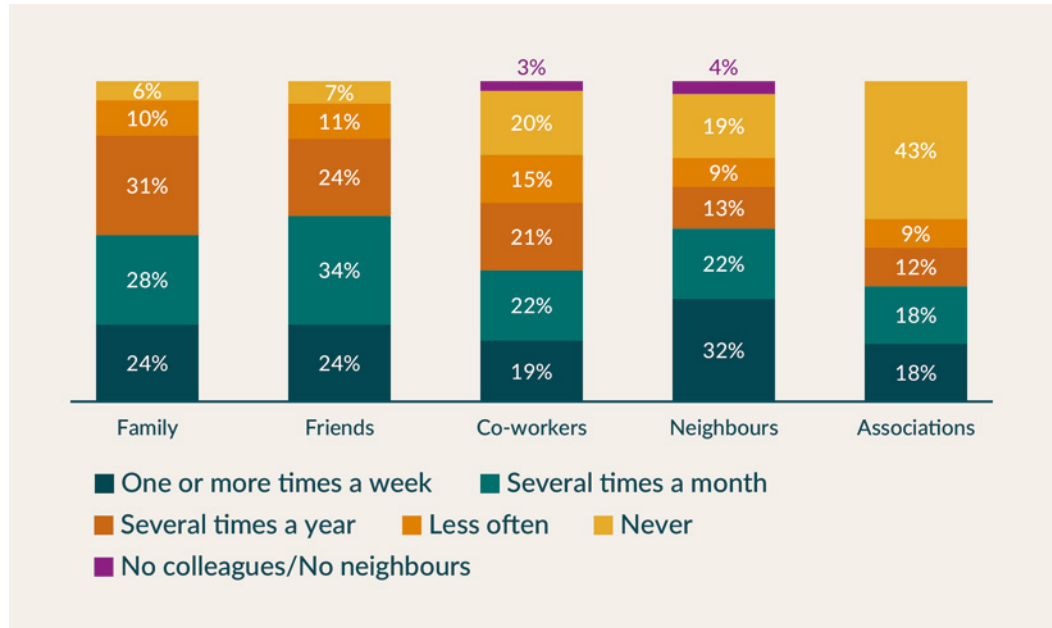
Scope: All persons aged 15 and over
For example: In July 2025, in France, 20% of unemployed people felt isolated, compared with 9% of employed people.

Friends and neighbours: the foremost social networks in the general population

Not all social networks play the same role in the lives of those surveyed. Some circles are more involved than others in terms of frequency of contact. Among them, **two networks stand out clearly: friends and neighbours.** In July 2025, 58% of people see their friends regularly and 54% see their neighbours regularly (Figure 5). **Family** ranks third in terms of frequency of contact (52%), although it retains a more central symbolic place than neighbours.

Figure 5
Frequency of physical contact with different social networks

Source: Crédoc, Living Conditions and Aspirations surveys, July 2025
Scope: All persons aged 15 and over
For example: In July 2025, 24% of people in France saw their family once or more per week.



People in northern France have more regular contact with their families than those in the south

People living in northern France maintain regular contact with their families more often than those in the south: 61% in the north compared to 48% in the Mediterranean regions. This difference can be explained, in part, by stronger territorial ties in the north, where a significant proportion of people live in the department where they were born. This lower residential mobility promotes geographical proximity and, as a result, more frequent family contact. Conversely, in the south, more mobile residence patterns and greater distances between members of the same family act as a limiting factor on regular contact.

Close ties: the cornerstone of sociability for those who are alone and/or isolated

The neighbourhood: a resource for lonely and isolated people

Overall, the lonely and isolated individuals interviewed emphasise the importance of small gestures between neighbours, which they see as a structuring element of their daily lives. Even when maintaining closer ties proves difficult, the neighbourhood remains an important pillar of their social life. It provides a reassuring presence, made up of regular interactions, sometimes very brief, but which help to keep them socially active. These relationships are usually cordial and limited to occasional exchanges of services, without leading to genuine interpersonal relationships.

Associations: a major source of social support for lonely and isolated people

Spaces for rebuilding and regular socialising

Year after year, the data collected confirms the strong bond that the non-profit, often grassroots, organisations known in France as “associations” have with the people they support. For many of those surveyed, these organisations are primarily seen as spaces for rebuilding. Beyond their restorative function, associations also provide stable and regular

social interaction, which is essential for keeping lonely and isolated people socially active. Those working in the field often play a central role in their social lives. Their regular presence is sometimes one of the few stable ties that these individuals have and maintain.

From receiving support to volunteering: a defining moment

When those receiving support manage to find their place within the association, it sometimes leads to voluntary involvement, whether solicited by the organisation or by their own initiative. This moment marks a real turning point in the support process. It marks the transition from passive recipient to active participant. This change in status reconfigures the nature of relations within association, allowing the person being supported to regain agency and to be recognised for their contribution. **Volunteering then becomes a space for bolstering self-esteem and for a return to active and positive social interaction, one that reconfigures people's relationship with themselves and others.**

Community initiatives shaped by the specific characteristics of each region

Social interventions in a large city, in a Priority Neighbourhood for Urban Policy (QPV), in an isolated rural area or in a working-class neighbourhood undergoing gentrification must be able to adapt to specific issues around the living environment and the particular constraints faced by residents. The case study of associations highlights that:

- **In large cities,** geographical proximity and urban infrastructure facilitate encounters and social ties, but – due to mobility and anonymity – do little to transform these interactions into lasting relationships.
- **In QPV neighbourhoods,** reliance on social and territorial proximity, with locals acting as mediators, helps to rebuild social bonds, provide information and facilitate access to rights in the face of vulnerabilities and distance from institutions.
- **In urban neighbourhoods undergoing gentrification,** the main challenge is to maintain accessible meeting places for vulnerable populations facing higher costs of living, as local shops are transformed and the urban environment is reshaped in ways ill-suited to the mobility of the less affluent.
- **In isolated rural areas,** the use of mobile devices helps to compensate for the remoteness of services and the scattered nature of settlements. They constitute an attempt to recreate spaces for socialising, while confronting barriers embedded in group conformity and the stigma associated with seeking help.

The underestimated potential of small businesses to create connections

In addition to neighbours and associations, **small businesses and shops play an important role in everyday life.** They provide opportunities for people to meet and interact; places where residents, including those who are alone or isolated, can maintain regular informal contact with others in their neighbourhood. **In large urban areas in particular, shops are a factor in social cohesion:** 23% of residents in large urban areas say they talk about personal matters with their local shopkeepers. **Conversely, people living in rural areas often prefer natural spaces** such as forests, mountains or the seaside **to break their isolation.**

Pointers for action: working with the social networks of each specific area to encourage social ties

The following lessons-learned are based on a cross-summary of data collected from actors in the field and material collected from lonely or isolated individuals. They reflect five main insights:

Be conscious of the differences between rural isolation and urban loneliness

Social isolation is more prevalent in rural areas, while feelings of loneliness are stronger in large urban areas. This duality indicates that, in rural areas, the obstacles are mainly structural: lack of services, limited transport and few spaces for socialising. In large urban areas, however, population density creates a paradox: despite geographical proximity, individuals feel lonelier. Any approach to combating isolation and loneliness must take into account these differences by developing physical points of contact and mobility in rural areas and by promoting local cohesion and a sense of belonging in large urban areas.

Encourage families, friends and healthcare professionals to identify situations of social vulnerability

Families, loved ones and healthcare workers can play a vital role in identifying situations of social vulnerability. Family and friends may notice changes in behaviour or mood: fewer visits, withdrawal from usual activities, expressions of discouragement or loss of interest. Healthcare professionals, meanwhile, are often the first people that isolated individuals turn to for support and are therefore best placed to detect these situations. Targeted awareness-raising could enable them to identify these early warning signs and, where necessary, initiate appropriate support.

Promote the role of neighbours as a vehicle for social cohesion

Encourage neighbourhood initiatives (monthly coffee meetings, shared gardens, mutual aid groups for shopping or home improvement). Train residents to become local reference persons – for example, through active listening workshops. The people with the strongest networks are often those who participate most in such initiatives, but mentoring programmes can inspire even the most isolated individuals to get involved. Such initiatives strengthen the sense of belonging, provide opportunities for informal encounters, and allow isolated individuals to feel part of a local network.

Strengthen outreach efforts, particularly in isolated areas

Although outreach initiatives are widely implemented by associations, they still face the challenge of reaching the most isolated and lonely individuals, particularly in very remote areas. In large urban areas, population density makes seeking help more anonymous, but in isolated rural areas, the fear of being identified as a person in need can make it that much more difficult to get through to the most isolated people. It is therefore essential to support outreach efforts with actions aimed at deconstructing negative perceptions about seeking support from associations, particularly in rural areas. Revitalising these measures requires experimentation, which could be supported by the various public stakeholders.

Promoting the pivotal role of associations in fostering social cohesion

Associations are 'relational third parties'. Whatever form their activity takes, they provide a space for relational and even emotional exchange. For people who are alone or isolated, the act of volunteering can be a very powerful vehicle for reconnection: participants develop a

sense of usefulness, bolster their self-esteem and expand their social network, which has a lasting effect on reducing loneliness. It is essential to support and promote associations so that they can welcome and support vulnerable people in their desire for action and engagement.

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