
Global attitudes to COVID19 pandemic and response

Research report
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Australia Institute's International & Security Affairs Program - Global attitudes to COVID-19 pandemic and response

April 2020

Key results

The Australia Institute's International & Security Affairs Program surveyed nationally representative samples of people in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States, Italy and South Korea about the COVID-19 pandemic.

The government and friends and family are the most trusted sources of advice about the COVID-19 pandemic, and the more trusted a government the higher its response to the pandemic is rated.

- In most countries, government and friends and family are the most trusted sources of advice about the COVID-19 pandemic.
- There is a close relationship between how trusted a government's advice is and how good their COVID-19 response is rated.
- Trust in government is highest in New Zealand (89%) and Australia (78%).
 - The United States has the lowest trust in government (57%).
- 83% of New Zealanders rate the government's overall response to the COVID-19 pandemic good, the highest of any country.
 - 71% of Australians rate the federal government's overall response good.
 - The lowest rating is the United States (49% rate good).

Fewer than half of those in work are confident they will keep their job.

- Australians are least confident they will keep their jobs and hours, with only one in three confident (34%).
- Australian and United States residents are equally likely to have already lost their job (both 16%).

People want their governments to take the lead in sustaining the economy.

- Australian and UK residents were most likely to say that the government should take the lead (both 64%), followed by NZ (62%).
- Only in the United States did fewer than half say that the government should take the lead (43%).

Trust to give clear and accurate COVID-19 advice

Respondents were asked to what extent they trust seven sources to give clear and accurate advice on the COVID-19 pandemic.

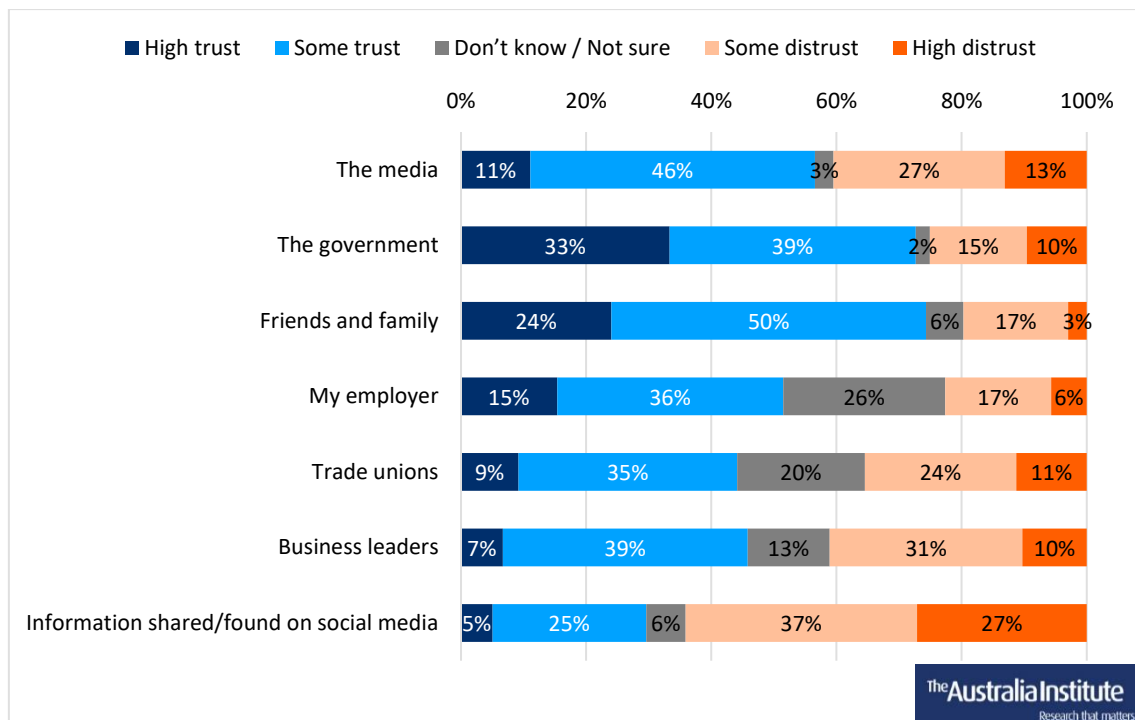
The sources were:

- the media,
- the government,
- friends and family,
- “my employer”,
- trade unions,
- business leaders and
- information found/shared on social media.

Although there was significant variation between countries, in general the government and friends and family were the two sources most trusted to give clear and accurate advice, followed by the media. Information shared/found on social media was the least trusted.

Not only is government as trusted as friends and family, it is significantly more likely to be highly trusted (33% vs 24%). Government is significantly better trusted than other traditional sources of authority, like the media, business leaders and trade unions.

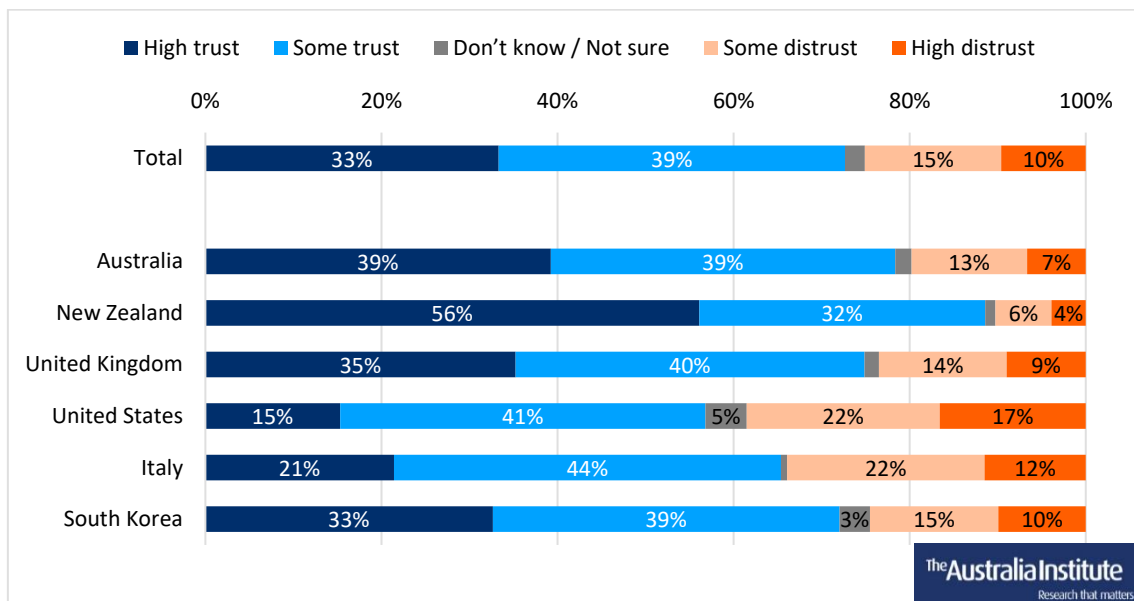
Figure 1: Trust to give clear and accurate advice on COVID-19, six-country average



The government was the most trusted source in most countries, with an average of 73% trust across the six countries (33% high trust).

- Trust in government is highest in New Zealand, where nine in 10 (89%) report some or high trust in government.
 - Well over half of New Zealanders (56%) have high trust in government.
 - One in 10 New Zealanders (10%) have at least some distrust.
- Four in five Australians (78%) report some or high trust in government.
 - Two in five Australians (39%) have high trust in government.
 - One in five Australians (20%) have at least some distrust.
- Three in four United Kingdom residents (75%) report some or high trust.
 - One in three (35%) in the United Kingdom have high trust.
- 72% of South Koreans and 65% of Italians report some or high trust in government.
 - 25% of South Koreans and 34% of Italians have at least some distrust.
- Less than three in five United States residents (57%) report some or high trust in government, with only 15% reporting high trust.
 - 39% have at least some distrust in the government.

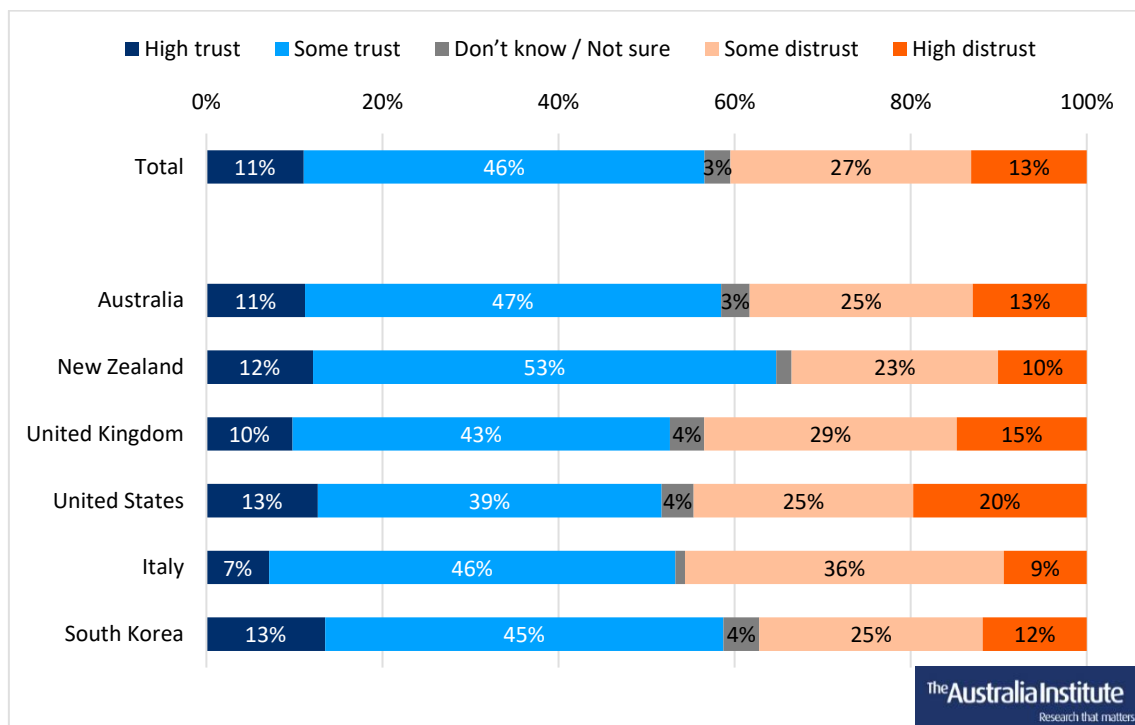
Figure 2: Trust in government to give clear and accurate advice on COVID-19



The media was around the middle of the seven sources of advice on the COVID-19 pandemic, with an average of 57% trust across the six countries (11% high trust).

- New Zealanders are next most trusting of the media, with 65% reporting at least some trust in the media.
- Three in five South Koreans (59%) and Australians (58%) trust the media.
- Over one in two United Kingdom (53%), United States (52%) and Italian (53%) residents trust the media.
 - Interestingly, despite similar overall levels of trust and distrust, Italians were much less likely to show high trust (7%) or high distrust (9%) in the media than United States (13% and 20%) or United Kingdom (10% and 15%) residents.

Figure 3: Trust in the media to give clear and accurate advice on COVID-19

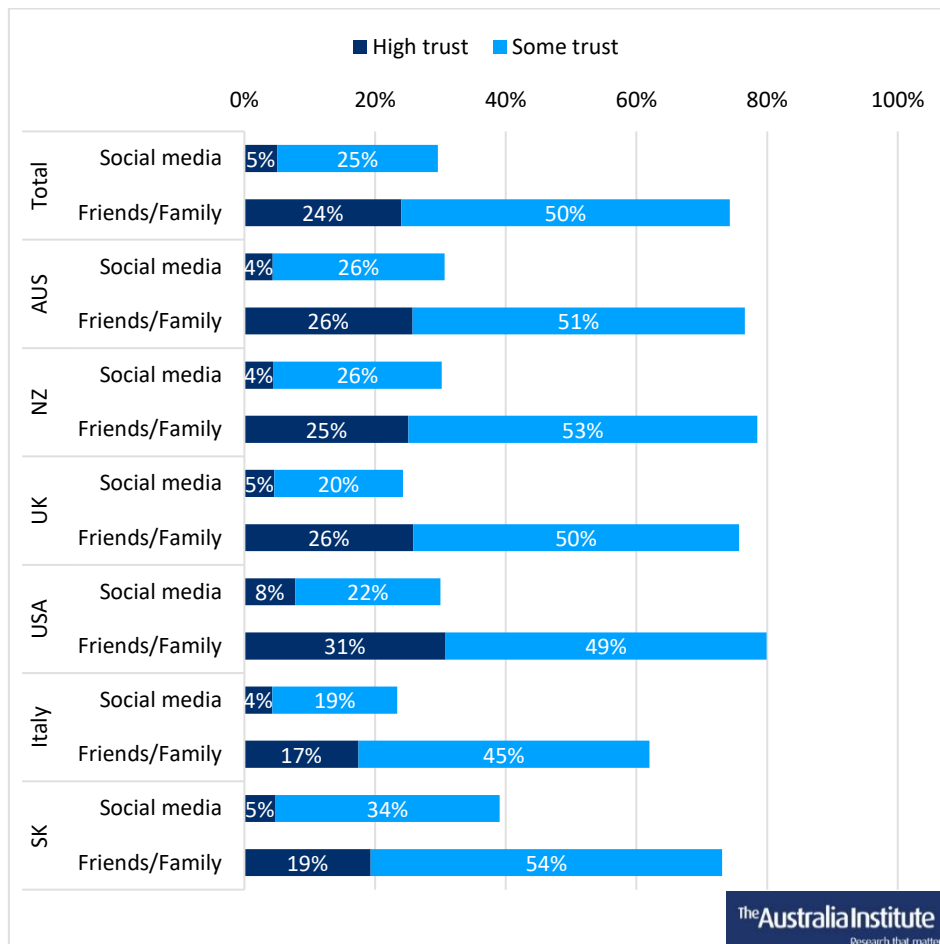


Two sources of potential COVID-19 advice that depend on personal networks are friends and family and information shared/found on social media.

These two sources have very different levels of trust, with friends and family the second most trusted source of COVID-19 (on average, 74% trust) and information shared/found on social media the least trusted (on average, 30% trust).

- Trust in friends and family is between 73% and 80% in five countries: Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States and South Korea.
 - Trust in friends and family is significantly lower in Italy (62%).
- Trust in social information shared/found on social media is between 23% and 31% in five countries: Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States and Italy.
 - Trust in social media is somewhat higher in South Korea (39%).

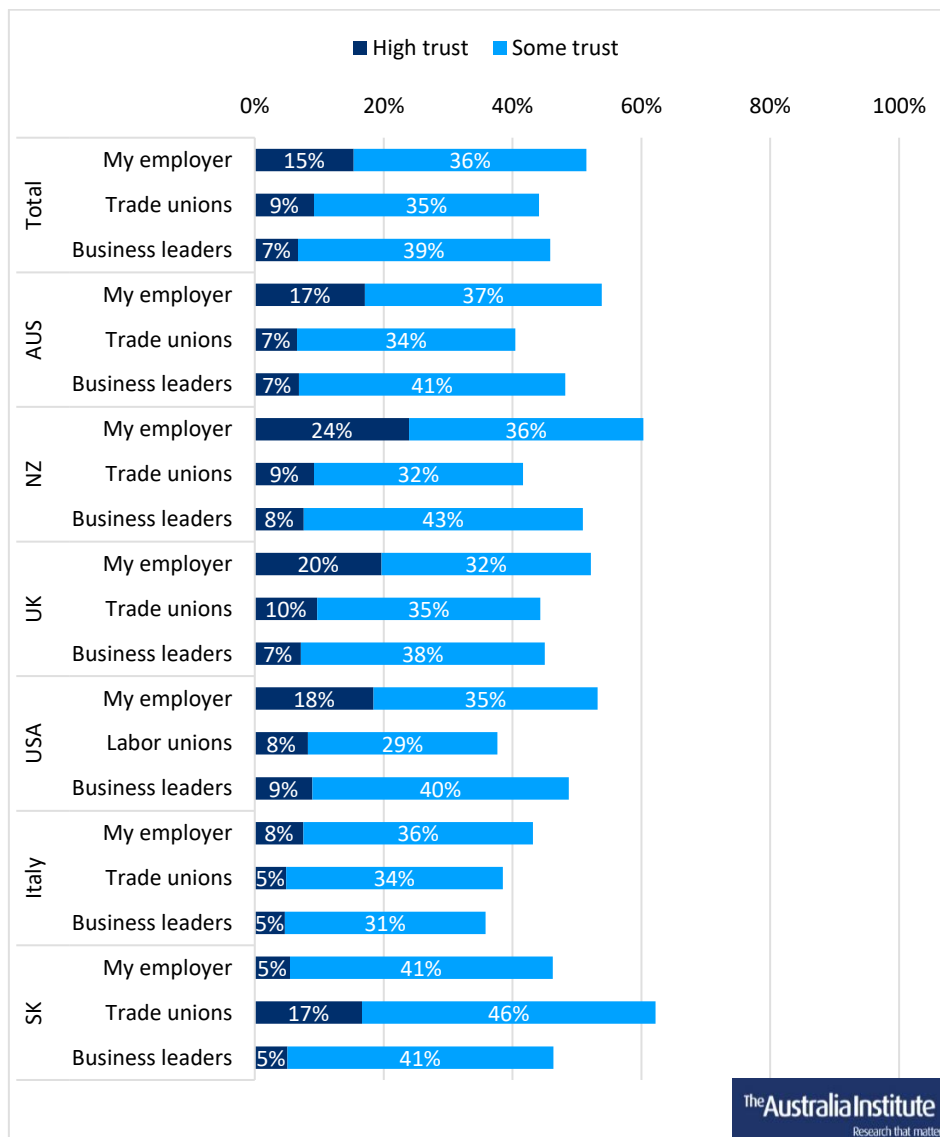
Figure 4: Trust in personal networks to give clear and accurate advice on COVID-19



Three sources of potential COVID-19 advice that depend on the employee–employer relationship are business leaders, trade unions and a person’s specific employer.

- In five countries, respondents report higher trust in their employer than in either trade unions or business leaders.
 - In South Korea, trust in trade unions (62%) is significantly higher than trust in business leaders or their own employer (both 46%).
- On average in the six countries, respondents report total trust of 51% for their own employer, 44% for trade unions and 46% for business leaders.
- In four of the six countries, trust in business leaders exceeds trust in trade unions: Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Figure 5: Trust in business and unions to give clear and accurate advice on COVID-19



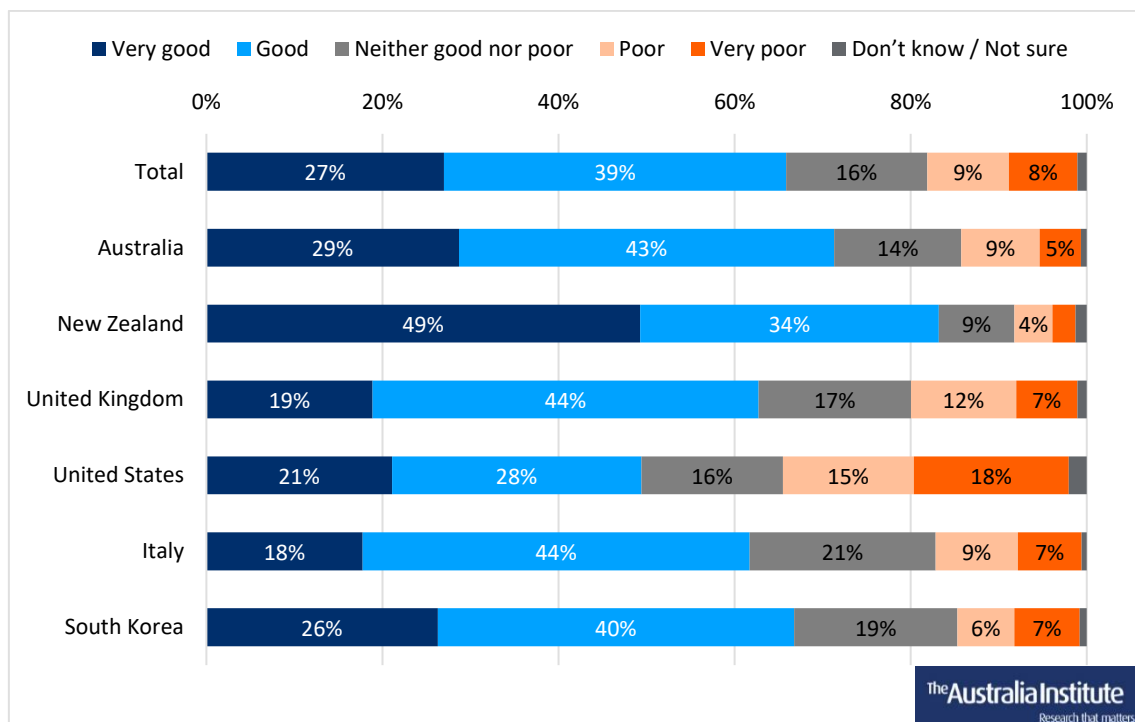
National government responses to COVID-19

Respondents were also asked two questions about how they would rate the national government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic: first, how they would rate the overall response and then how they would rate the economic response.

In five of the six countries, a majority of respondents rated their government’s overall response as good or better.

- Four in five New Zealanders (83%) rated the Ardern government’s overall response as good or better.
- Seven in 10 Australians (71%) rated the Morrison government’s overall response as good or better.
- Around two in three South Korean (67%), United Kingdom (63%) and Italian (62%) residents rated their governments’ response as good or better.
- Half of United States residents (49%) rated the Trump government’s response as good or better.

Figure 6: Government’s overall response to COVID-19

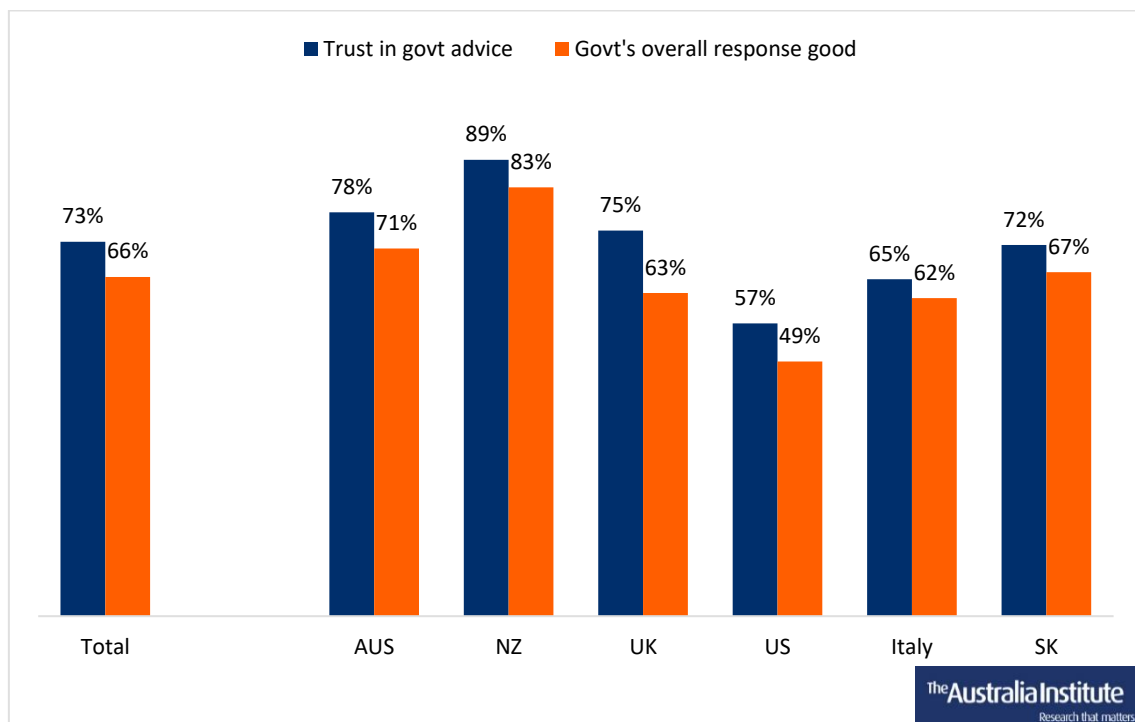


There is a close relationship between what share of the population of a country trust government advice and what share of the population rate the national government’s overall response to COVID-19 as good (as shown in Figure 7).

This could indicate that some governments are both more trustworthy and better at responding to public health problems; that successful COVID-19 responses make people trust governments more; that having a population that trusts government advice improves COVID-19 responses; or other factors that would cause trust in advice and the quality of the government response to correlate.

- The greatest disparity is in the United Kingdom, where the share of the population that trust government advice is 12 percentage points higher than the share that say the government’s response has been good.
- The smallest disparities are in Italy (4 percentage points), New Zealand and South Korea (both 5 percentage points).

Figure 7: Trust in COVID-19 advice; rating of overall response to COVID-19



In three of the six countries, a majority of respondents rated their government’s economic response as good or better.

- Seven in 10 New Zealanders (69%) and Australians (68%) rated their governments’ economic response as good or better.
- Three in five United Kingdom residents (62%) rated the Johnson government’s economic response as good or better.
- Under half of United States (46%) and South Korean (44%) residents rated their government’s economic response as good or better.
- Only one in three Italians (33%) rated the Conte government’s economic response as good or better.

Figure 8: Government’s economic response to COVID-19

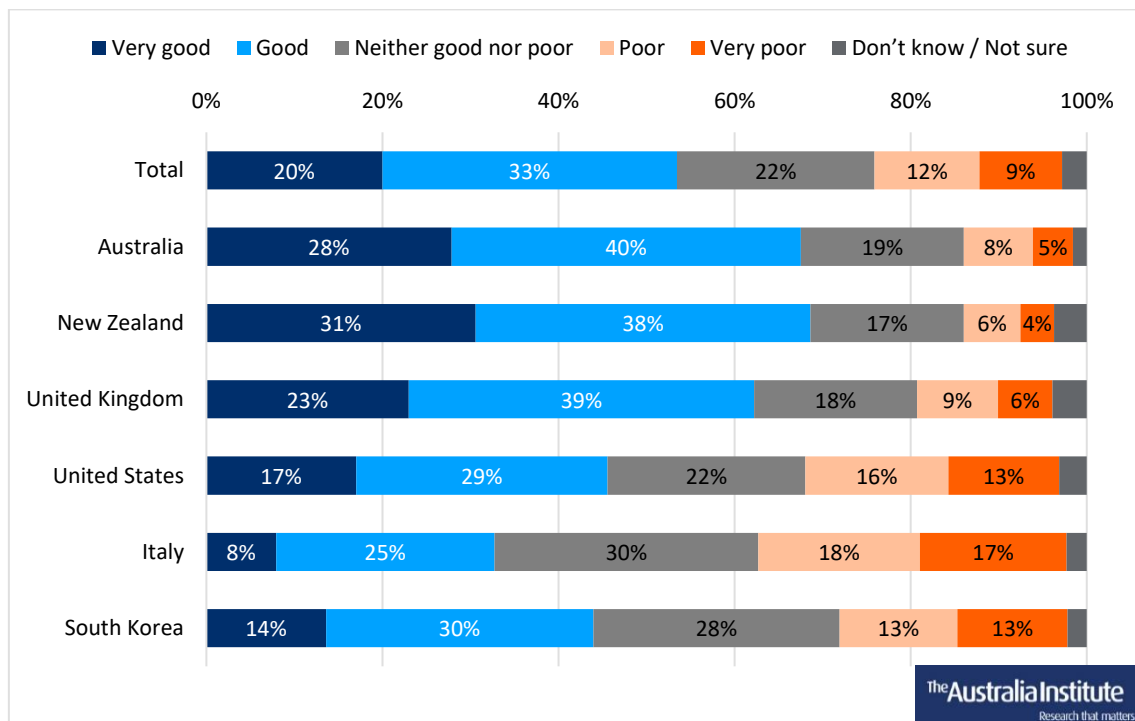
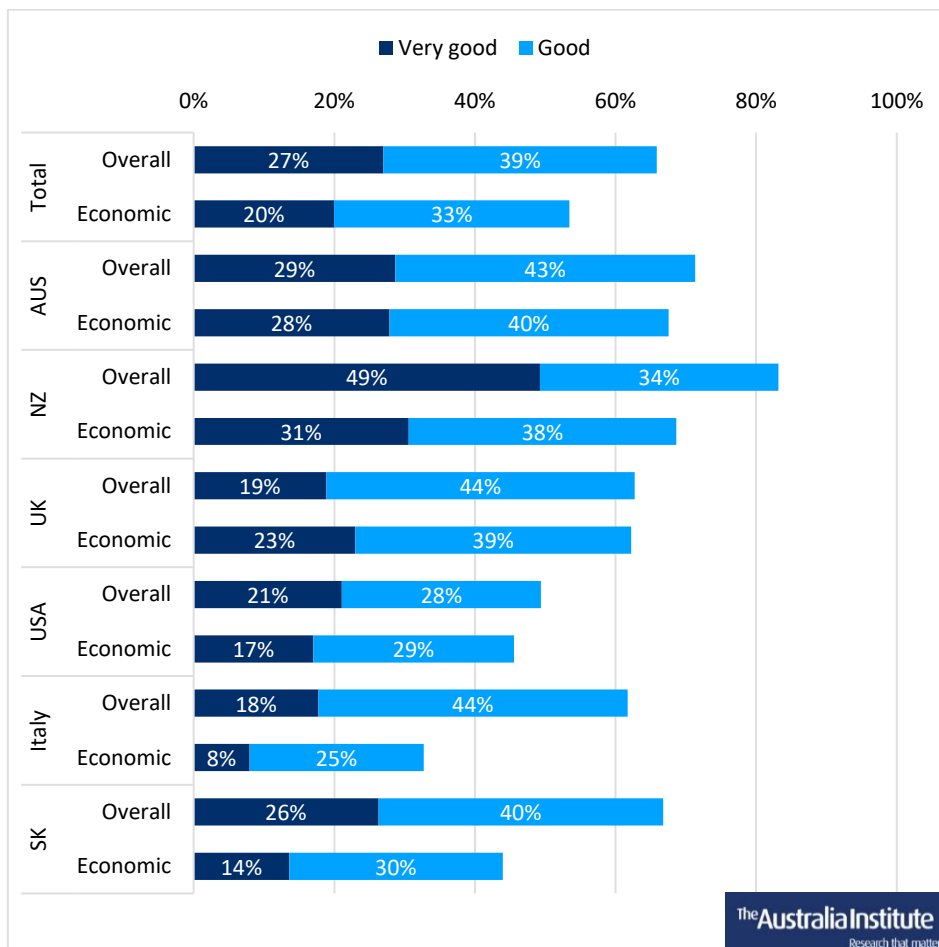


Figure 9 compares the responses for a country’s overall response and its economic response (“good” or “very good” responses only):

- New Zealander respondents are most likely to say that overall and economic responses are good or better.
 - However, fewer say that the economic response was good than say that for the overall response.
 - New Zealand leads Australia by 12 percentage points on overall response (83% vs 71%), but only by 1 percentage point on economic response (69% vs 68%).
- On average, governments are rated 12 percentage points lower for their economic response than their overall response.
 - The largest gap is Italy, where 62% rate the government’s overall response good or better but only 33% say the same thing for the economic response (29 percentage point difference).
 - There is no difference in how the United Kingdom’s responses are rated (63% and 62%, a 0 percentage point difference).

Figure 9: Government’s responses to COVID-19 (good and very good only)



Responsibility for sustaining the economy

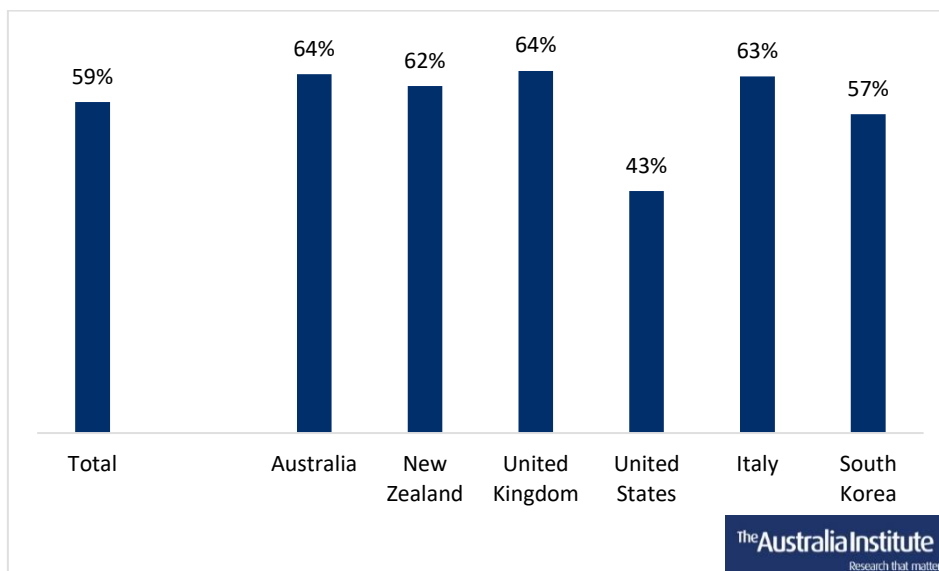
Respondents were asked which out of five groups they think should take the lead in sustaining the economy:

- Government
- Big business
- Individuals
- Small business
- Charities

Overall, government was selected by three in five respondents (59%) and was twice as likely to be selected as the other four groups put together.

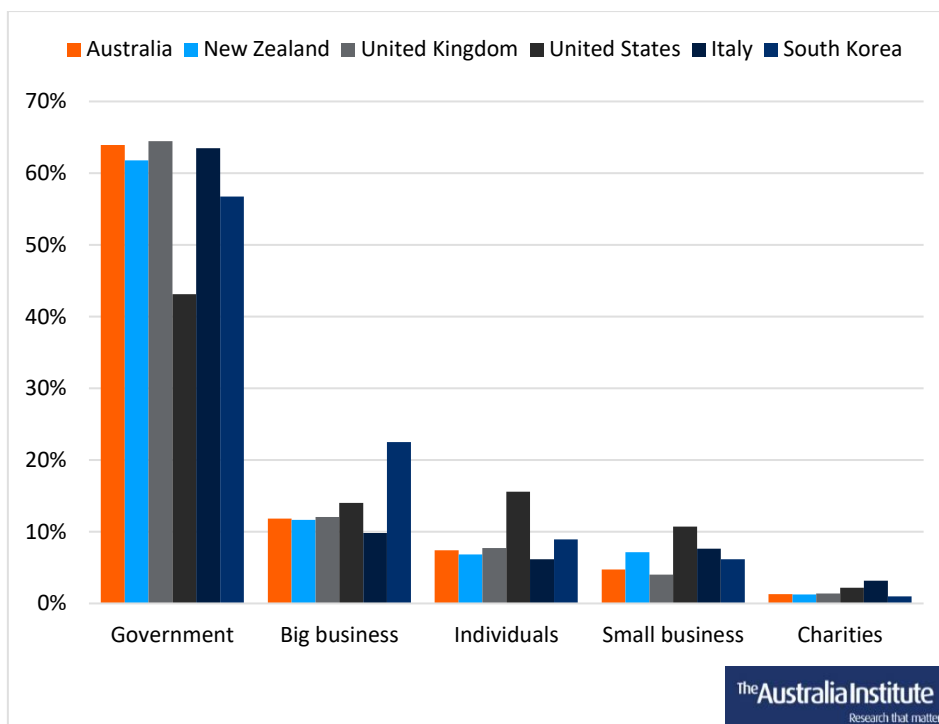
- Australian and UK residents were most likely to say that the government should take the lead (both 64%), followed by Italy (63%) and NZ (62%).
- Only in the United States did fewer than half say that the government should take the lead (43%).
 - Even in the United States, government was chosen to take the lead more than twice as often as any other option.

Figure 10: Government should take lead in sustaining the economy



- Big business was the second most popular choice, chosen by 14% of respondents.
 - One quarter of South Korean (23%) residents nominated big business.
 - 12% of Australians nominated big business.
- Individuals and small businesses were the second and third most popular choices, nominated by 9% and 7% respectively.
 - 16% of United States residents said individuals should take the lead, the second most popular choice for the US.
- Only 2% say that charities should take the lead in sustaining the economy.

Figure 11: Who should take lead in sustaining the economy?



Concern about employment

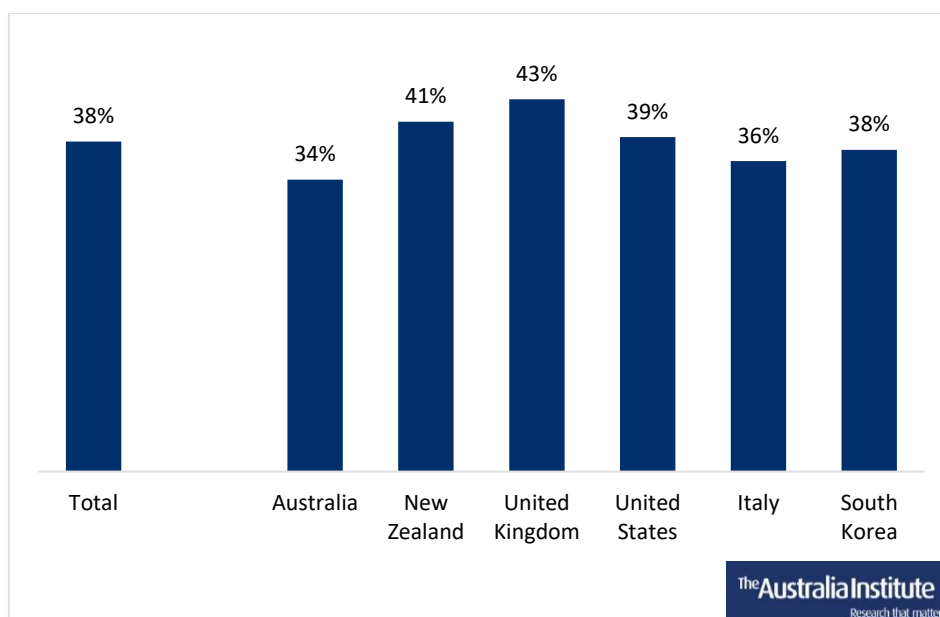
Respondents were asked which best describes the circumstances of their job:

- I didn't have a job even before the COVID-19 pandemic
- I'm confident I will keep my job and current hours through this crisis
- I expect to work reduced hours, but to keep my job
- I'm worried I might lose my job but I'm confident that my employer will do everything they can to keep me employed
- I'm worried my employer will lay me off or stop giving me shifts as soon as it is in their interests to do so
- I have already been laid off or stopped receiving shifts
- Don't know / Not sure

Those who did not have a job even before the COVID-19 pandemic were excluded and the results re-weighted to ensure that comparisons across countries were only of the employed.

- One in three Australians are confident they will keep their current jobs and hours (34%).
 - This is the lowest rate of confidence in any country.
 - Confidence is highest in the United Kingdom (43%) and New Zealand (41%).

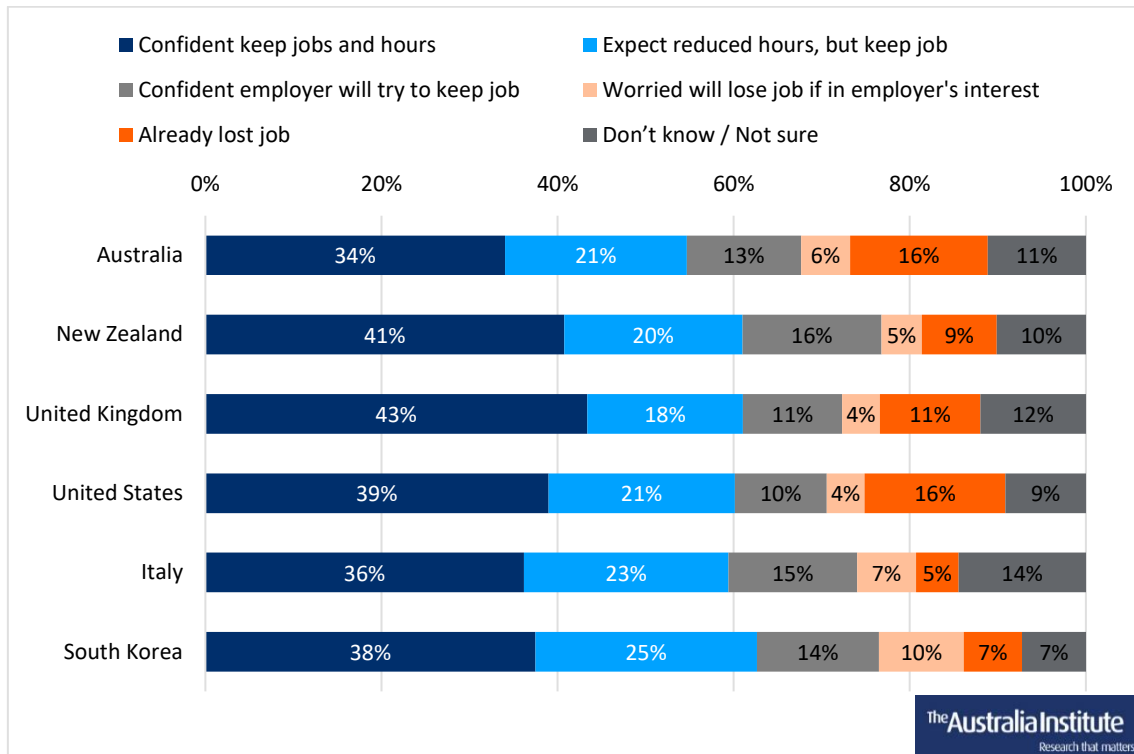
Figure 12: Confident will keep job and current hours through this crisis, by country



Note: As a share of those in work at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Australian and United States residents are most likely to have already lost their job or stopped receiving shifts (both 16%).
- Italian residents are least likely to have already lose their jobs (5%).

Figure 13: Circumstances of job, among those in work at beginning of pandemic



Note: As a share of those in work at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Method

The Australia Institute conducted national surveys of over 1,000 people in six countries (Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States, Italy and South Korea) between 1 and 14 April 2020, online through Dynata with nationally representative samples by gender, age and region.

Questions were translated for Italian and South Korean respondents.

The “regions” used to select a nationally representative sample vary by country: states and territories in Australia, the North and South Islands in New Zealand, four regions in the United States (Northeast, Midwest, South and West), 12 regions in the United Kingdom, 20 regions in Italy and 16 regions in South Korea.

The margin of error (95% confidence level) for the national results is 3%.

Detailed results

To what extent do you trust each of these sources to give you clear and accurate advice on the COVID-19 pandemic?

The media

	<i>Total</i>	<i>AUS</i>	<i>NZ</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>USA</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>South Korea</i>
High trust	11%	11%	12%	10%	13%	7%	13%
Some trust	46%	47%	53%	43%	39%	46%	45%
Some distrust	27%	25%	23%	29%	25%	36%	25%
High distrust	13%	13%	10%	15%	20%	9%	12%
Don't know / Not sure	3%	3%	2%	4%	4%	1%	4%

The government

	<i>Total</i>	<i>AUS</i>	<i>NZ</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>USA</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>South Korea</i>
High trust	33%	39%	56%	35%	15%	21%	33%
Some trust	39%	39%	32%	40%	41%	44%	39%
Some distrust	15%	13%	6%	14%	22%	22%	15%
High distrust	10%	7%	4%	9%	17%	12%	10%
Don't know / Not sure	2%	2%	1%	2%	5%	1%	3%

Friends and family

	<i>Total</i>	<i>AUS</i>	<i>NZ</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>USA</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>South Korea</i>
High trust	24%	26%	25%	26%	31%	17%	19%
Some trust	50%	51%	53%	50%	49%	45%	54%
Some distrust	17%	15%	14%	14%	12%	29%	18%
High distrust	3%	2%	2%	2%	3%	6%	2%
Don't know / Not sure	6%	6%	5%	9%	5%	4%	7%

My employer

	<i>Total</i>	<i>AUS</i>	<i>NZ</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>USA</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>South Korea</i>
High trust	15%	17%	24%	20%	18%	8%	5%
Some trust	36%	37%	36%	32%	35%	36%	41%
Some distrust	17%	12%	9%	11%	12%	29%	29%
High distrust	6%	3%	4%	4%	5%	11%	7%
Don't know / Not sure	26%	31%	27%	33%	30%	17%	17%

Trade unions¹

	<i>Total</i>	<i>AUS</i>	<i>NZ</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>USA</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>South Korea</i>
High trust	9%	7%	9%	10%	8%	5%	17%
Some trust	35%	34%	32%	35%	29%	34%	46%
Some distrust	24%	25%	22%	20%	21%	35%	22%
High distrust	11%	13%	8%	10%	11%	21%	5%
Don't know / Not sure	20%	22%	29%	26%	30%	6%	11%

Business leaders

	<i>Total</i>	<i>AUS</i>	<i>NZ</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>USA</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>South Korea</i>
High trust	7%	7%	8%	7%	9%	5%	5%
Some trust	39%	41%	43%	38%	40%	31%	41%
Some distrust	31%	29%	27%	29%	27%	43%	30%
High distrust	10%	10%	8%	10%	12%	15%	7%
Don't know / Not sure	13%	13%	14%	15%	13%	6%	17%

Information shared/found on social media

	<i>Total</i>	<i>AUS</i>	<i>NZ</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>USA</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>South Korea</i>
High trust	5%	4%	4%	5%	8%	4%	5%
Some trust	25%	26%	26%	20%	22%	19%	34%
Some distrust	37%	34%	37%	34%	30%	47%	41%
High distrust	27%	29%	28%	35%	32%	28%	11%
Don't know / Not sure	6%	7%	5%	7%	8%	2%	9%

¹ Respondents in the United States were asked about “labor unions” instead.

How would you rate the national government's overall response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

	<i>Total</i>	<i>AUS</i>	<i>NZ</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>USA</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>South Korea</i>
Very good	27%	29%	49%	19%	21%	18%	26%
Good	39%	43%	34%	44%	28%	44%	40%
Neither good nor poor	16%	14%	9%	17%	16%	21%	19%
Poor	9%	9%	4%	12%	15%	9%	6%
Very poor	8%	5%	3%	7%	18%	7%	7%
Don't know / Not sure	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%

How would you rate the national government's economic response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

	<i>Total</i>	<i>AUS</i>	<i>NZ</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>USA</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>South Korea</i>
Very good	20%	28%	31%	23%	17%	8%	14%
Good	33%	40%	38%	39%	29%	25%	30%
Neither good nor poor	22%	19%	17%	18%	22%	30%	28%
Poor	12%	8%	6%	9%	16%	18%	13%
Very poor	9%	5%	4%	6%	13%	17%	13%
Don't know / Not sure	3%	2%	4%	4%	3%	2%	2%

Thinking about the months ahead, which of the following do you think should take the lead in sustaining the economy?

	<i>Total</i>	AUS	NZ	UK	US	Italy	SK
Government	59%	64%	62%	64%	43%	63%	57%
Big business	14%	12%	12%	12%	14%	10%	23%
Individuals	9%	7%	7%	8%	16%	6%	9%
Small business	7%	5%	7%	4%	11%	8%	6%
Charities	2%	1%	1%	1%	2%	3%	1%
Don't know / Not sure	10%	11%	11%	10%	14%	10%	5%

Thinking about your job, which of the following best describes your circumstances?

	<i>Total</i>	<i>AUS</i>	<i>NZ</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>USA</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>SK</i>
I didn't have a job even before the COVID-19 pandemic	30%	34%	28%	31%	33%	35%	21%
I'm confident I will keep my job and current hours through this crisis	27%	23%	30%	30%	26%	24%	30%
I expect to work reduced hours, but to keep my job	15%	14%	15%	12%	14%	15%	20%
I'm worried I might lose my job but I'm confident that my employer will do everything they can to keep me employed	9%	9%	11%	8%	7%	10%	11%
I'm worried my employer will lay me off or stop giving me shifts as soon as it is in their interests to do so	4%	4%	3%	3%	3%	4%	8%
I have already been laid off or stopped receiving shifts	7%	10%	6%	8%	11%	3%	5%
Don't know / Not sure	7%	7%	7%	8%	6%	9%	6%

Weighted to exclude those who did not have jobs even before the pandemic:

	<i>Total</i>	<i>AUS</i>	<i>NZ</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>USA</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>SK</i>
I'm confident I will keep my job and current hours through this crisis	38%	34%	41%	43%	39%	36%	38%
I expect to work reduced hours, but to keep my job	21%	21%	20%	18%	21%	23%	25%
I'm worried I might lose my job but I'm confident that my employer will do everything they can to keep me employed	13%	13%	16%	11%	10%	15%	14%
I'm worried my employer will lay me off or stop giving me shifts as soon as it is in their interests to do so	6%	6%	5%	4%	4%	7%	10%
I have already been laid off or stopped receiving shifts	11%	16%	9%	11%	16%	5%	7%
Don't know / Not sure	11%	11%	10%	12%	9%	14%	7%