

VIRALCOMM.INFO

INTERVIEW STUDY

VIRAL COMMUNICATION PROJECT



Research report



IMPRINT

PUBLISHER

Viral Communication Project

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TRANSLATION

German to English

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Berlin, 20.12.2021



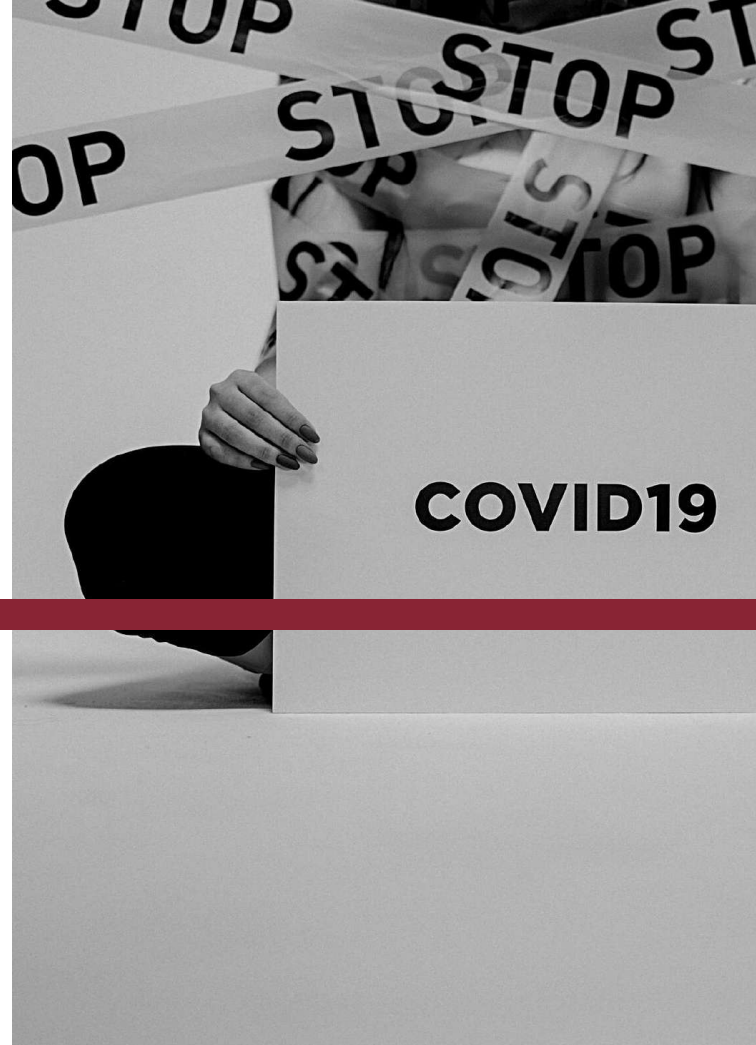
THE PROJECT

VIRAL COMMUNICATION

The SARS-CoV2 pandemic is a global crisis that has changed the world. The ViralCommunication project, funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), has investigated how people in Germany have experienced the pandemic, the challenges they have faced and how they have made sense of and dealt with them.

OVER TIME

The goal of our research project is to develop integrative and effective strategies to best contain the negative impacts of the pandemic. For this purpose, it is particularly important to have robust, scientific data on people's perception of risk, attitudes and their actual behaviour in relation to COVID-19 and the changes it has caused in society.



In addition to the representative online survey, in-depth interviews with a cross-section of the population are crucial for understanding people's challenges, fears and concerns, their means of coping with them, their reasons for (dis)trusting certain information sources and actors, and how they think about the government's measures to contain the pandemic. As the pandemic is a dynamic situation in which attitudes and opinions can change over time, a total of three in-depth interviews were conducted with 38 individuals (Round 1: December 2020, Round 2: April 2021, Round 3: September 2021).





COVID19

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all participants for their trust, time and openness. They have given life to the project through their rich testimonies and have contributed, on behalf of the entire population, to expressing the diversity of views, opinions and thoughts we find through the pandemic.

This booklet is intended to give a taste of the interviews we conducted in the project and to present a range of responses from our participants. For each round of interviews, short quotes are presented, organized by a number of key topics covered in the interviews.

We hope you find the insightful and enjoyable to read!

Your ViralCommunication Team



ROUND 1

DECEMBER 2020

CHALLENGES

"Bureaucratic things, like short-time work (Kurzarbeit) and all the applications that I've never done before and some of which I've never heard of."

(female, 30-44 years)

"Small businesses were left alone. Families were also left alone. And such companies as [...] the automobile industry, [...] the railways, they especially were massively supported."

(female, 60+ years)

"I think the general psychological strain is simply there, even if it doesn't affect me personally in terms of my job or something like that. So far, none of us have been affected in terms of health. So everything is fine, but these background thoughts are always there. And I find that a burden. Also that you can't really tackle what you had actually planned."

(female, 16-29 years)

"The biggest challenge was certainly working from home all the time, getting used to it. Of course, that has its advantages, but of course it also has its disadvantages. It is still a challenge. In summer it wasn't quite as bad. I find it worse now in winter or autumn, in the dark and cold season, because you don't meet anyone else during the day."

(male, 30-44 years)



CHALLENGES

How did you deal with the challenges?

"I just kept myself very well informed and share information with my work colleagues."

(female, 30-44 years)

"Yes, at most we can get angry. So, well, it is a bit difficult. [...] Well, you can see if there are any petitions, for example, in the Bundestag. That's one option, for example. Or by discussing these things with friends, acquaintances and family and perhaps passing them on, or encouraging them to think about it."

(female, 60+ years)

"I have not taken advantage of any professional help now. I haven't taken anything in the direction of counselling services either, but I just try to keep my head above water (laughs) and also talk to people who are similarly minded."

(female, 16-29 years)

"Yes, I try to go for a jog at least once a day, or at least to get some fresh air outside and to move a bit and to meet someone or to go for a walk, either with my girlfriend or with my closest friends."

(male, 30-44 years)



MEASURES

"Well, I think that on the one hand you have to keep your distance from people if you can't avoid meeting them. On the one hand, it's about shopping in public, on the way to work and all that, but on the other hand, it's also about reducing your own contacts. I can imagine that the risk is higher if I really meet regularly with acquaintances, relatives, whatever, and just have a lot of contact."

(female, 16-29 years)

"Yes, well, of course I try to stick to the rules, and then always wash my hands often or when I'm out and about, then also disinfect my hands and of course also wear a mask. So I don't wear a normal cloth mask either, but always try to wear an FFP2 mask."

(male, 30-44 years)

"To protect myself? In principle, I can hardly protect myself from it. It's like in the last few years when influenza was going around. I didn't try to protect myself then either. I'm at an age and in a state of health where I say I don't have to protect myself against it. I am not in the risk group. I don't have asthma. I'm not extremely susceptible to it, so it doesn't make sense for me to try to protect myself from it in any way."

(female, 30-44 years)

"The most important thing is hygiene."

(male, 45-59 years)



1.5 m



MEASURES

"Of course, I also realise that we should keep our distance. I just think that some of the measures that are taken are only taken from a symbolic point of view, to show 'we are doing something', yes.

Interviewer: What would that be, for example?

[...] Well, the clearest example is the museums. I was in the museum three times, in the interim period, where it was allowed. The risk of getting infected there was certainly zero. There were distances much greater than 1.5 meters. Masks were compulsory. Then there was someone in every hall to monitor that people didn't get too close to each other. I honestly cannot for the life of me understand what difference it can make now to close the museums."

(male, 60+ years)

"You have to adapt. There are also restrictions; it is also sometimes tedious. But it works. It can all be integrated. So for me personally [...] there is too little checks in the public space."

(male, 60+ years)

"



MASKS

"Well, it's just normal to wear the mask. When you feel sick or have a cold."

(female, 30-44 years)

"Well, I have to say, I don't really have any problems with it. Sure, it's annoying. In the beginning it was always a bit more inconvenient because you had to get used to it. But in the meantime, as sad as it is, I find that the mask simply belongs to it. You remember it, you have it with you."

(female, 16-29 years)

"Unpleasant. Fundamentally unpleasant. My glasses fog up, very classic. But [...], what is necessary is necessary."

(male, 16-29 years)

"I have to say, you get used to it by now. I have no problems wearing the mask now, or no problem putting the mask on. It's not a great restriction now."

(male, 30-44 years)

"Well, I never wear it. I used to do it in the beginning. Initially, when it was - I don't remember - April, May. And then, at some point I said 'No, I don't see any - I don't see any point in it'. Because now when I'm shopping, I keep my distance from people, which is meaningful."

(male, 30-44 years)



VACCINATION

"I would at least not get vaccinated right at the beginning. [...] I wouldn't do that because I'm simply too afraid of the side effects. Because there hasn't been much research into it yet. And precisely because I am also susceptible to medication, I have a lot of allergies and I would be skeptical about whether I would tolerate it well."

(male, 30-44 years)

"I tend to get vaccinated if the vaccination is possible. But of course you have a bit of doubt because these are vaccines [...] that have been developed at record speed. Of course, you can't know the long-term consequences."

(male, 60+ years)

"Yes, the risk is not yet assessable for me and at the moment I can't decide whether to do it or not. Maybe it's a bit opportunistic. And I'm not saying that the others should vaccinate themselves first. At the moment, the question doesn't arise for me and that's why I can't say 'yes' or 'no' at the moment. If at some point it is my turn, then I will have to make a decision."

(male, 45-59 years)

"I am not fundamentally against vaccination. There are vaccinations that make sense. According to the current state of science, I don't think it makes sense to be vaccinated with something that has not been sufficiently tested."

(male, 30-44 years)





TRUST

"My concern, honestly, about the restrictions on freedom is not that they are going too far at the moment. My concern is more that people will get used to a new restriction being decided every week by political elites - because it's the executive, it's not even parliament - every week [...]."

(male, 60+ years)

"What happened is that at first the flow of information was very poor, what was revealed by the federal government. I think because they didn't know exactly themselves. Various politicians and, yes, people in the public more or less made fun of it. Yes, 'made fun of it' is perhaps a bit exaggerated, but just a bit about it, yes, yes, made fun of the compulsory wearing of masks in some countries."

(female, 30-44 years)

"Yes, because I think it is somehow not a clear line that was taken from the beginning and then recommendations are always made to the federal government, and I can't really always understand it. At the very beginning it was said that the masks would not stop the virus or that the masks were not necessary. And then masks were made compulsory everywhere."

(male, 30-44 years)



ROUND 2

APRIL 2021

CHALLENGES

"The biggest challenge was in winter. Because of the bad weather, the cold weather. It was often difficult to go out, or you had to force yourself to go out, and that's why you spend a lot of time at home."

(male, 30-44 years)

"[...] the biggest challenge was actually the change from fabric masks to FFP2 masks. Because you already noticed that there is a difference in terms of getting air."

(male, 30-44 years)

"Yes, there is WhatsApp and a lot is done online now. It's still somehow not the same" (laughs)."

(female, 16-29 years)

"The biggest challenge for me was that the children also had more to do with homeschooling again."

(female, 30-44 years)



CHALLENGES

How did you deal with the challenges?

"Yes, we make sure that we have the same structure at home every day. the same structure, the same routine. And of course we also make sure that the children can meet at least one friend regularly."

(female, 30-44 years)

"With humor."

(female, 60+ years)

"Yes, trying to keep a cool head in all the reporting."

(female, 16-29 years)

"Too much alcohol."

(female, 45-59 years)



MEASURES

"For me, the most important measures are still: Contact reduction, wearing a mask, hand hygiene. Yes, those are the most important things for me. It doesn't work any other way."

(male, 30-44 years)

"Wearing the mask, distance rules, hygiene rules, yes, that's it, and of course, if you are vaccinated then: the vaccination."

(male, 60+ years)

"I have to walk around with a mask everywhere. I don't have the opportunity to decide for myself at all. On the contrary, I am even unprotected because I can no longer do certain things, because I can't train my immune system by seeing other people. Because I can no longer do the sports I would otherwise like to do for my health."

(female, 45-59 years)

"So de facto - (I am) breaking the corona rules. And that's because the Corona rules are harmful to health. [...] Everything you are supposed to do now harms the immune system. So I tell myself: I won't do that. I live in such a way that I stay as healthy as possible. I go outside. Because I don't want to be left with a ruined immune system at some point, when all this is lifted, and then the first pathogen that comes along will knock me out."

(male, 45-59 years)



1.5 m



MASKS



"Of course, I think it's even safer now, because they've made these medical masks compulsory. I think you really have to make sure that you take a bit of a mask break. [...] So if you pay attention to that, I think it also protects you very well."

(female, 30-44 years)

"No, I already did that [wearing masks] before in the same way. It made sense to me from the beginning. I never changed anything about it."

(female, 60+ years)

"I wear mask everywhere where it is mandatory, nothing has changed. That's the way it was. That's the way it is. In certain contexts I am very skeptical whether it makes sense. You have to wear a mask outdoors from the supermarket car park onwards. But you have no problem at all keeping your distance. I think it's pointless, but I do it because I don't feel like starting a fight."

(male, 60+ years)

"I think people have become a bit, yes, almost more careless. I think that hygiene has actually suffered a bit in the course of time. Because it has simply become an everyday object. You get used to it, it's okay, you wear the thing. But you don't necessarily make sure that it is always used hygienically."

(female, 16-29 years)



VACCINATION

"So of course I want to protect myself. But I also want to protect other people around me. There are also older people, in-laws, people with pre-existing conditions."

(female, 30-44 years)

"I don't understand why the government doesn't vaccinate faster. I am absolutely not a fan of the US, but they are doing one thing right and that is: They vaccinate in the supermarket car park if they have to. In Israel, they vaccinate 24 hours a day. So I would have no problem being at the hospital or wherever at three o'clock for a vaccination. The main thing is that it happens quickly; the less dead we have. [...] Every vaccination is associated with a certain risk. And as long as the Corona vaccination is not significantly more risky than any flu vaccination, I have a bit of an elevated pulse, of course, but no real concerns. [...] We need to achieve herd immunity somewhere. That's very clear, those are simply scientific facts in my eyes. And for the most part we're achieving it well now through this vaccination, so that at some point we can get back to some normality. It would be better to contribute to that than to be an eternal doubter."

(male, 16-29 years)

"Probably, if I had to name one main reason, it is to regain freedom, personal freedom and collective freedom. Just so that people can meet again, work with each other, just strengthen that personal community. That's the main reason, and otherwise also personal security."

(male, 16-29 years)



VACCINATION

"And with these many millions who have already been vaccinated. There are almost none, percentage-wise speaking (laughs), there are almost no side effects. So I think that's an exaggerated fear. And of course I know [there are], in very rare cases, but that applies to all vaccinations. I still had the smallpox vaccination and so on in my youth, which has long since ceased to exist. And that sometimes had severe side effects. [...] The idea of zero risk is absurd. You have to choose the risk that is the lowest."

(male, 60+ years)

"Normally I am a big vaccination fan. My family has every vaccination you can get. But I don't do it [the Corona vaccination] out of conviction and it's basically also a bit humiliating that you can't live in this country any other way [than to be vaccinated]."

(female, 45-59 years)

"I just don't want to be a guinea pig. A vaccine that hasn't been adequately tested - except now on the people who are getting vaccinated - I think is very dangerous."

(male, 30-44 years)



TRUST



"I think [the reporting] is a deliberate propaganda of lies. [...] That is, we are governed by people who live very differently from the average people. And so there are some decrees, some laws that cannot be practically implemented in life. But the people who decide are not affected by the laws they make. As I said, we actually have a dictatorship, a dictatorship that was once abolished but has now been preserved again [...]."

(female, 60+ years)

"I mean, (sighs) I can understand that (laughs) the politicians, they have to try to balance different interests. And they are then faced with facts and questions, which they have had nothing to do with until now. And that's why I can understand that inevitably there are uncertainties, contradictions, and that mistakes are made. I understand all that, yes. But what annoys me is that I have the impression that if we compare it now with a year ago, there has been no progress at all. We are still talking about the same issues. People are still working with the same strategies."

(male, 60+ years)

"You are always presented with a fait accompli. So, the process, the decision-making, the possibility to get involved in the decisions, to take a stand. That's really the point. Just being informed what you have to do."

(female, 44-59 years)



TRUST

"Yes, actually this back and forth. So that [Ms Merkel] doesn't even have a clear position, like, 'I am now Chancellor, you have to listen to me now, this is how we do it now'. Because she had already started with that and then [...] retreated again. And I really thought that was a pity. She should have stood up for herself, or for the country."

(male, 30-44 years)

"No. I can't see my way through it anymore. One says hop and the other says go, then it says Easter rest [Osterruhe], then it doesn't. And that's just, yes, I would simply like a clearer structure. It feels like every fortnight, when the prime ministers sit together, they change their approach and afterwards you stand there with your trousers down and don't know what to do."

(female, 16-29 years)

"I would prefer the federal government to take over and have the competence and the power to enact the laws. And they would then be enacted across the board. Because as it is, it's an enormous patchwork that somehow tries to please all kinds of special interests. So, in the end you don't please anyone. And in my opinion, the damage is also greater as a result."

(male, 60+ years)



THE END OF THE PANDEMIC

"As soon as we reach 70%, I call it herd immunity. Maybe we have to discuss the exact time period again, but I say 70%. And then I would lift the restrictions as they currently exist, and all non-vaccinated people would then have to be denied access to certain things."

(male, 16-29 years)

"If we stop testing. So, if testing is stopped. As long as there is testing, there will be positive results."

(female, 30-44 years)

"Yes, if you can live a normal life again, like you had before everything started. If it all goes back to the way it used to be."

(male, 30-44 years)

"If it was no longer constantly present in the media. If we had our basic rights again. If freedom of travel was restored and things like that."

(female, 45-59 years)



"When we have understood that we have to live with it. [...] No, there won't be an end. At most, just a return to normal life, knowing that someone can get Corona at any time".

(female, 30-44 years)



LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

"Difficult to say. On the one hand, there will somehow be huge parties again. There will be an upswing for many who have missed it now. And they will want to party hard. [...] So, there will be winners and losers, but it will change our society. But I don't think it would really fundamentally change it for the better or for the worse."

(male, 60+ years)

"There will definitely be more home offices."

(female, 16-29 years)

"Bygone I don't think it will be [in the summer, heading into the autumn]. It's going to be a disease pattern like, worst case scenario, Ebola outbreaks all the time. It will be with us for decades. But it's also not as bad as it's made out to be, I think. I'm afraid it won't be like it was before. And I don't think that's necessary. I would like it to be a bit more decelerated. I can also imagine that something has got going in the population, at least in the younger population. I can imagine that we will then experience an economic upswing; that we will also experience a social upswing."

(male, 16-29 years)



LESSONS FROM THE PANDEMIC

"So in terms of the climate and in terms of living together in general, there is certainly a lot. It's just that many people forget about it very, very quickly. [...] I can think of a lot of things that I would like to see improved."

(female, 60+ years)

"I hope that there will be lessons, but that's what they say about many events in history, that they should have been lessons and unfortunately they weren't."

(female, 16-29 years)

"And I hope that my colleagues will no longer come to the office with a cold. That has always been a thorn in my side, because this winter I haven't had a cold or flu or anything else. And in the office I usually picked up something because my colleagues come to the office with a cold."

(male, 30-44 years)



ROUND 3

SEPTEMBER 2021

CHALLENGES

"The return to the office again. Well, it's only partial, but before you were completely in the home office and then to go back to the company in the morning for 50% of the time was also a change for the first time. Of course, you had to get used to it."

(male, 30-44 years)

"The biggest challenge was actually for me personally with my daughter, who is a total vaccination advocate and also, let's say, does not accept any other opinion. To find a consensus, to meet without talking about politics, etc. That is sometimes very difficult because we don't know what to say. That is sometimes very difficult, because we are all politically very, let's say, engaged. [...] When you meet with someone who thinks differently, you try to keep this topic out of it. That's the most difficult thing at the moment."

(female, 45-59 years)



CHALLENGES

"Of course, the challenge in the last few months has been that you have to constantly adapt to new rules, as you have done all along. Then only access is for vaccinated, recovered and tested or before it was different."

(male, 60+ years)

"Getting over myself to get vaccinated."

(female, 30-44 years)

"So it wasn't that easy. At least then in June, July then to get the vaccination appointments. So that was a very-many-hours-search with this weird vaccination centre."

(male, 30-44 years)

"I found that a difficult time in that there was this uncertainty. This insecurity is not the same for an almost 80-year-old person as it is for 30-year-olds, for whom a great deal depends on this time and this experience and also professionally and so on. So I was already in one of those general, well, depressions, you can't say that. I was actually a bit worried, mainly about what might happen."

(female, 60+ years)



MEASURES

"The most important measures are still wearing a mask, keeping your distance, having as few contacts as possible at, let's say, big events or something like that. So I'm still very cautious, even though I would love to do something like that again. But yes, that's still a long way off for me."

(female, 30-44 years)

"Well, it's compulsory to wear a mask and to keep your distance, I think that's the most important thing. So, of course, this also protects you from other things, from colds or flu."

(female, 30-44 years)

"First of all, vaccination, of course. Secondly, the normal 3G rules [vaccinated, recovered, tested]. So keep your distance and so on and so forth. That's just universal, does that apply. I mean, simple physics (laughs)."

(male, 16-29 years)

"Whenever I've been outside, I wash my hands immediately. So that's definitely the most important thing I think. Because as soon as you touch something, you don't know who touched it before. When I go shopping, for example, I immediately disinfect my hands and the trolley. Yes, and the mask. That's quite clear. Those are the most important things."

(male, 30-44 years)



MASKS



"I have to say that from the beginning I didn't really believe that the masks would really help. Of course, keeping your distance helps. Washing your hands properly is good, the hygiene measures in general, all that is totally understandable to me. But I still find this mask thing very absurd, because I touch my face and then maybe touch the door handle and then something can be transmitted."

(female, 16-29 years)

"I start to forget it [the mask] again, strangely enough. So although I, I don't, I don't mind the mask. [...] when I have [the mask] on, I don't notice it anymore, or don't consciously. But I kind of have a current tendency to forget about it."

(male, 16-29 years)

"The more I get fooled, the more I undermine [wearing a mask]. So, I try to avoid it. I try to avoid the situation where you have to wear masks. And where you have to wear masks, where no one is looking, I don't do it anymore. [...]"

(male, 45-59 years)



VACCINATION

"I remain convinced that it is right and important to get vaccinated. I am still convinced that it should be up to everyone voluntarily anyway."

(female, 30-44 years)

"I think it's state overreach that's going on. It's not covered by any law anymore in my opinion."

(male, 45-59 years)

"Yes, absolutely in favour. In principle, I would be in favour of making it compulsory. Of course, not for those who have previous damage or for whom vaccination would be dangerous. Of course, there are cases like that, with medical advice. But for all those who are suitable for vaccination, I would actually be in favour of making it compulsory."

(male, 30-44 years)

"Vaccination itself is still an experiment. The vaccines have not been tested. [...] I am not a guinea pig either. I see the risk of vaccination as much, much higher than the risk of corona disease."

(male, 45-59 years)



THE END OF THE PANDEMIC

"When everyday life becomes largely normal again. So that masks are no longer compulsory. Yes, that you can perhaps go to big events again without worrying that the intensive care units are full."

(female, 30-44 years)

"I would define being over by saying that I move in public without worrying about disinfectant, distance and general infection tendencies."

(male, 16-29 years)

"When there is no more news about the latest variant. And I always say since Delta, I'm sure there's only been one more now, somehow or nothing came, I don't know. Maybe it's all levelling off a bit now. Because all the big epidemics that there have always been, they also ended at some point."

(female, 60+ years)



THE MOST POSITIVE EVENT

"The vaccination, I think. I think with the vaccination it was actually a small new stage in life of security and that not so much can happen to us now. Because at some point you also develop a panic fear of the hospital. So that was already the most drastic experience."

(female, 16-29 years)

"Yes, the nice experience was simply travelling again in June."

(male, 45-59 years)

"Let's put it this way, whenever there were relaxations that was very positive. Other than that, the time didn't really have a lot of positives."

(female, 30-44 years)

"I don't have such an extraordinary, noteworthy, positive event. [...] The situation is shitty. As an unvaccinated person, you are a leper who is no longer allowed to do anything. Where is the positive aspect supposed to come from? I haven't been on holiday for two, for one and a half years. [...] I can't get out of this country anymore. I'm allowed less and less from day to day. There is nothing positive."

(male, 45-59 years)

"The most positive thing was actually that many people think like me. I've always been a bit of a lateral thinker, or a bit more critical in everything, and I've noticed that a lot of people think the same way."

(female, 45-59 years)

"I think I already said that last time, so the most positive thing is actually that we have changed our shopping behaviour so that we only shop once a week. (laughs) So we think in a more planned way, no longer [...] running to the supermarket every two days to have to go shopping."

(male, 30-44 years)



LESSONS FROM THE PANDEMIC

"Yes, one of the most important lessons was that you can't actually plan anything."

(female, 30-44 years)

"Yeah, I don't know. The bottom line is that this pandemic actually reduces you to the most basic things. To a very narrow circle of people and you also have a lot of time to reflect on yourself and think about yourself, of course. And at the end of the day, yes, I've actually learned that you can only look people in the eye and you can't please everyone."

(female, 16-29 years)

"To stick together in any case."

(female, 16-29 years)

"Yes, that it's good to maybe just come to rest. To come to a standstill and just think about goals, things. Important things and perhaps also simply unimportant things that one previously considered important to - how should I put it? - eliminate, or rather no longer perceive."

(male, 30-44 years)

"My personal lesson is, even more than before, to let everyone live, to let them be as they are. Also to be able to tolerate and accept other opinions. I think that's very important. (sighs) And not to impose one's opinion on everyone. That has become really bad in this society."

(female, 16-29 years)

"So not directly on Covid, but on everything that comes out of it, I do draw the lesson that you have to try and discuss your political views and the things you think with people."

(female, 60+ years)

