



Re *redefining*
a Better
Life at Home

What life at
home in a
pandemic has
taught us

Welcome

In the midst of a global pandemic, planning for the future is difficult. And yet, people have never had more time to reflect, reimagine and redefine a better life at home for themselves.

So, what are people around the world thinking about today and hoping for tomorrow?

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Exploring Life at Home

Every year, we speak to thousands of people to help us understand what makes a better life at home. This work tells us that we're living in an era defined by the five core emotional needs of home: privacy, security, comfort, ownership and belonging.

This year, as the world around us changes, that work is more timely and important than it's ever been. Because, for many of us, life at home has become everything.

At IKEA, we're fascinated with all the intricacies of life at home. So we set out to explore how the experience of living through a global pandemic is influencing people's emotional needs and re-shaping their relationships with their homes.

Our Mission

We want everyone to thrive at home. But finding happiness there isn't just about the size, location or value of our houses; it's about our homes meeting our emotional needs.

These needs are universal, but they play different roles at different stages of our lives, depending on how old we are, who we live with and where we are in the world. Each year, our research helps us understand these needs a little more, so we can create solutions for a better life at home. And right now, whether our homes meet our needs has never been more important.

Privacy: This is being able to disconnect, reflect and choose how you interact with others.

Comfort: This isn't about a comfy bed or a fluffy throw, it's about feeling content and at ease in our surroundings.

Ownership: This means having a sense of control over the space and place where we live.

Belonging: This means feeling part of a group that accepts us, in a place that reflects who we are.

Security: This isn't about physical or financial security, but about feeling safe and grounded when we're at home.

WEEKLY VIRTUAL CONVERSATIONS WITH 20 HOUSEHOLDS

This Year's Approach





Local View

Sweden

Despite some distinction between urban and rural experiences, restrictions in Sweden are recognised as some of the most lenient in the world. Of the households we spoke to, most reported feeling calm and content with the minimal changes to ways of living in the initial weeks of the pandemic. More recently, however, the mood appears to have changed slightly, with some now questioning the lack of stronger restrictions implemented by the government, and discomfort felt around the growing infection and death rates.

Italy

A country profoundly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, Italy has experienced some of the most extreme lockdown measures in the world. Households we've spoken to have experienced a significant impact on their wellbeing due the length of lockdown, limited access to outside space, and fear and stress over economic challenges. In June, Italians were able to step outside their homes for the first time in months. While this was characterised by overwhelming joy and gratitude to be reconnecting with the outside world, people also experienced strict rules for social distancing and health and safety.

United States

The experience of life at home in the US has differed for people living in the different states. There are visible tensions between those who are taking the threat seriously and those aren't; those abiding by the rules and those advocating for them to end. In the wake of the killing of George Floyd and the ignition of the subsequent Black Lives Matter movement, people in the US have most prominently experienced the impact of multiple intersecting global issues. For many, the US has been navigating more than one pandemic, which has exacerbated the daily worries of life at home.

Australia

The states within Australia have had different experiences of the pandemic. Sydney was considered a hotspot at the start of the outbreak, while in Brisbane, life at home was minimally impacted. People have observed changes to restrictions almost daily and, as businesses reopen, the number of people allowed to socialise in groups grows, workplaces confirm working from home to the end of the year and households feel ever closer to a more normal life.

China and Hong Kong

Across the cities we heard from, households described a level of preparedness for this pandemic, confidence in the approach and familiarity with required responses following the SARS outbreak. Still, the impact has been profound on life at home and personal wellbeing. The easing of the lockdown restrictions brought with it feelings of optimism, although people continue to interact with caution and some worry about the possibility of future spikes of infection, whilst being aware of ongoing protests.



The Struggle to Adjust

Across the five countries, people are adjusting to the challenges and struggles of this new normal. So, what has this looked like for our households?

Acting with Caution

Wearing face masks and gloves, handwashing, avoiding handshakes and hugs and maintaining distance when socialising – no longer can people complete simple actions without a thought. Making ‘always on’ micro decisions, both inside and outside their homes, makes the world outside feel tiring and stressful.

Staying Alert

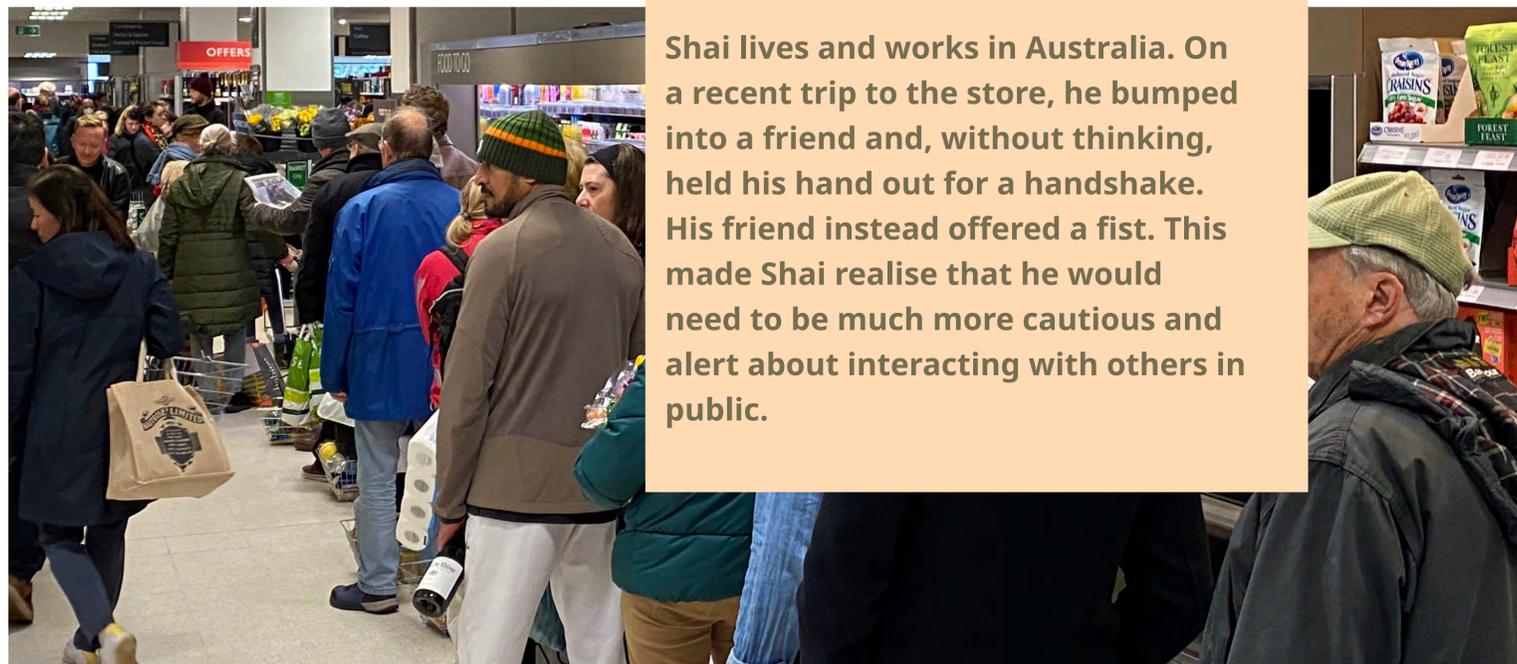
New worries for the health and safety of themselves, their loved ones and the world they interact with are strikingly prevalent among our households. As more people move through the streets, children return to school and businesses such as hairdressers reopen, many feel concerned about the possibility of infection and are staying watchful of all the possibilities.

Household Report

Nicole and her young daughter live in Australia. After many weeks together at home, she was recently able to send her daughter back to daycare. While she’s pleased life is getting closer to normal, it doesn’t stop Nicole worrying that at daycare her daughter is more at risk.

Household Report

Shai lives and works in Australia. On a recent trip to the store, he bumped into a friend and, without thinking, held his hand out for a handshake. His friend instead offered a fist. This made Shai realise that he would need to be much more cautious and alert about interacting with others in public.



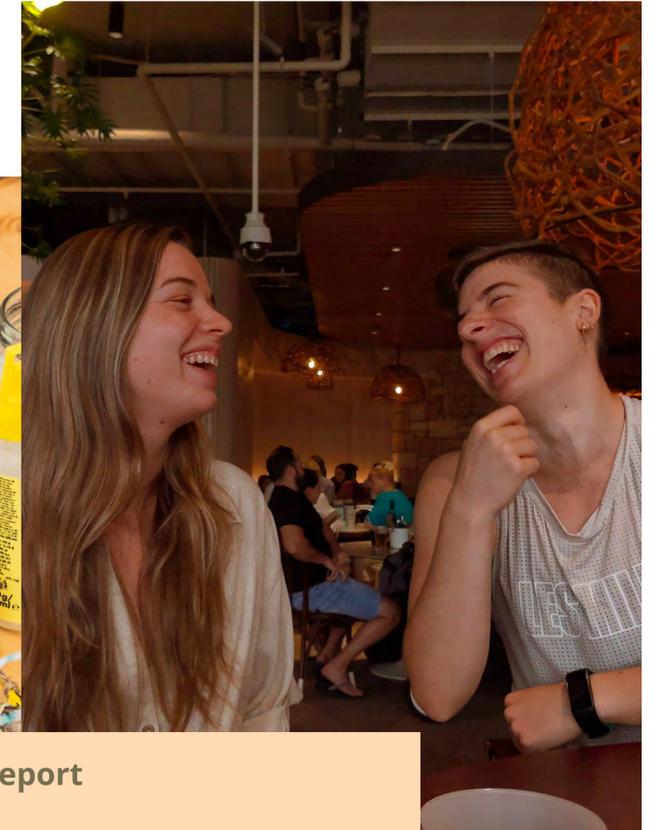
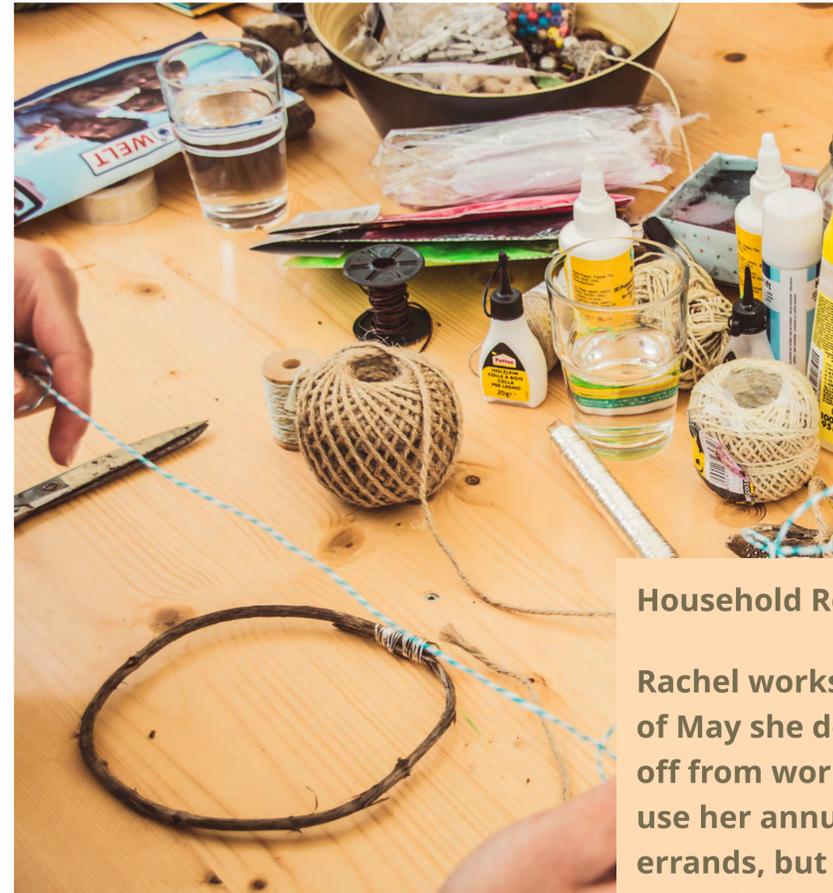
Life at Home is Uncertain

Reworking the Home

Those who have the privilege of working from home are realising that this way of working and living will remain for the long term. So, they're actioning home improvements that didn't seem like a priority before. Setting up homes for 24/7 occupation is now a need that many are trying to satisfy – from investing in home office furniture, to brightening up garden spaces.

Taking Time to Nurture Wellbeing

Day-in, day-out spent largely at home has started to take its toll, with many aware of the impact it's having on their mental and physical wellbeing. Whether struggling to find the time for exercise or the breathing space to disconnect, people are learning that looking after their wellbeing requires a consciously active approach.



Household Report

Rachel works hard, so in the middle of May she decided to take a day off from work. Normally she would use her annual leave to catch up on errands, but not this time. By taking a day for herself, she was able to finish home decoration projects, take control of her happiness and reduce work-related stress levels.



Hope and Optimism for the Future Remains

From crisis comes altered perspectives. As the 'hamster wheel' of daily life has been paused, the past few months have given people a rare chance for deep self reflection and re-evaluation.

Many are using this time to really consider what's important to them, what fulfils them and where they want to focus their time and energy. The result is a collective realisation that we can use this time as an opportunity to consciously reset and strive for a better version of the life we knew before the pandemic.

Household Report

In the US, Ashley felt rushed in her life before the pandemic. She was always too busy to spend time on the simple things that she now realises are what keep her well. Now, she's growing food to eat and really appreciating the time she's able to spend camping and walking in the countryside.



As we gradually look to a return to normality, there's a determination to stop taking things for granted in the future. Whether it's seeing family or grabbing a coffee on the way to work, this period of restriction has renewed people's sense of appreciation for the small things in life.

"Family life is important. I've come to realise that I shouldn't merely focus on making money, but that I need to strike a balance between work and family life."

Alfred, Hong Kong

Whilst many people are facing extreme uncertainty in the short term, there's comfort and hope to be found in planning for a better future – both within people's immediate worlds, and also in the world around them.

Reflecting.

Reimagining.

Redefining a better life at home.

The optimism people are feeling is prompting the hope of a different kind of life at home beyond the pandemic. In this unusual time of reflection, many are questioning what's really important – and how they might shape a life in line with this.

Breaking and *Remaking* the Cycle

What we have seen over the past three months has been a sudden break in the cycle of daily life. The habits, routines and rhythms that had provided structure no longer exist in the same way. So, as people look ahead and reflect on what this experience has taught them, they're starting to consider which of those previous habits and rhythms are really worth building back.

People are rebuilding with different priorities:

Space and Access to Nature

The fact that most homes aren't built for 24/7 occupation has been felt in many of our households, especially in countries where apartments with no gardens are the norm. As people are re-evaluating what's important in their homes, space is often top of the agenda. This includes the space to keep work separate from everything else, space to exercise or do things and also space to get closer to nature in a garden or balcony. Throughout our study, we spoke to people who felt happy with their homes and others for whom home wasn't meeting all their needs. Both groups agreed that in the future, and if this – or something like it – was to happen again, they wanted more space and access to nature as a priority.



Household Report

Illenia loved her home in Italy. She thought it was perfect. But now she's realised what she needs in the future is more space, a garden and access to nature.



A Slower Pace of Life

For many people, this time has offered a rare-but-much-needed pausing of life. Even as normality returns, home remains a place that protects us from the pace of the outside world. Our households tell us they've treasured this slower pace of life, and describe a new consciousness and intentionality – particularly when it comes to hobbies and self care. People hope they'll be able to protect this time and not rush straight back into their previous way of living.

"If possible, it would be nice if we could be more conscious about the separation of home and work, trying as much as possible to finish work before going home, to avoid working from home."

Mikael, Sweden

Redefining a Better Life at Home

Home at the Heart, Not in the Background

Some people told us how little time they'd typically spend at home before the pandemic, because so much of life was lived outside of those four walls. So in forcing everyone to spend more time at home than ever before, the effect of the pandemic is a reinvigoration of people's emotional relationships with their homes. For those who used to see home as 'just a place to sleep', there's been a re-evaluation and new appreciation of home as the 'centre stage' of life.

"I'd treat home less as a place to live, and more as a hotel where I came in the evening to sleep before my next day at work."

Dilip, Sweden

Physical and Emotional Comfort at Home

Throughout the pandemic, we've witnessed people's rich journeys with home, from initial gratitude and respect for its protection, to increasing frustrations with the challenges of imperfect housing conditions. But consistent through it all has been the importance of comfort. People want to continue making changes to their homes that prioritise the practical comfort they need to balance work, life and new roles under the same roof. They also want to maintain the emotional comfort of personal boundaries and continue to find privacy in 'me time'.

Individual Impact Beyond the Home

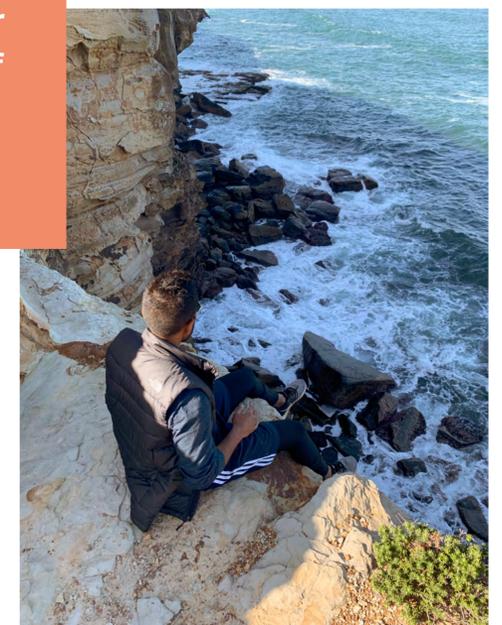
The experience of living through this crisis has made many people more aware of the link between individual action and collective impact, with most realising that new behaviours started in response to the pandemic have much wider benefits. Things like buying more locally, trying to reduce food waste, growing vegetables and choosing to cycle or walk rather than use other transport – people told us they want to keep these positive behaviours, to help create and maintain a better life in the future.



Household Report

People are really thinking about their actions right across the world. Mikael in Sweden is more aware of the ripple effect of his choices on society, and Margareta in Italy is connecting her small everyday actions with creating a better world.

Elsewhere in Italy, Illenia has noticed a profound change in those around her, with people adapting their behaviours for the good of everyone.



Conclusion

Now's the time to *rebuild* a better life at home

We thought we knew what a better life meant: getting up, commuting, socialising, exercising, working hard, playing hard, having fun. We thought we knew, until we knew we didn't. The pandemic has given us perspective. It's challenged our homes, our values and our priorities. It's shaken up our way of life in ways we didn't know it needed.

Now's a unique chance to turn a strange and difficult time into fuel for the future. To reflect on what we've learnt about ourselves and how we've lived. To consciously plan for a life at home that meets our new and reprioritised needs.

A better life at home isn't only for the lucky few. By making more time in daily life for family, friends, self care and big and small home changes, a better life at home can be for the many.

Get inspired at
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lifeathome.ikea.com



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