Social Connections and Loneliness in OECD Countries

A new report from the WISE Centre

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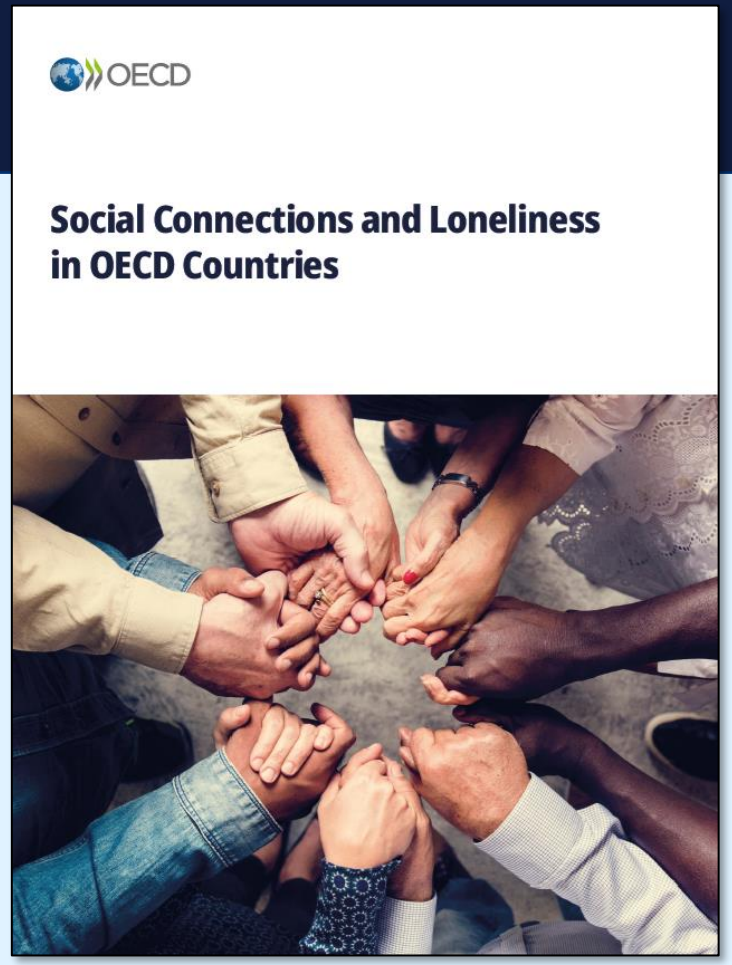


OECD

BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES

CENTRE ON WELL-BEING, INCLUSION, SUSTAINABILITY AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY (WISE)

A fulfilling social life matters for broader well-being, and the costs of disconnection are high

Social connections cover the ways people **interact** with and **relate** to one another

Quantity	Time spent socialising / alone	Type of social contact	Network composition
Quality	Social support	Loneliness	Relationship satisfaction

Loneliness and isolation are associated with ...

- Poor health, premature mortality
- Lower productivity, unemployment
- Higher drop out rate
- Shapes voting behaviours

Supportive networks and strong social ties are associated with ...

- Better health, happier and satisfied
- Job satisfaction, creativity
- Better academic performance
- Job opportunities, less crime, disaster response

Growing recognition of social connections as policy priority

National policies and programmes

Platform Against Loneliness in **Austria**

Denmark National Partnership Against Loneliness

Finnish Parliamentary Working Group on Strengthening Inclusion and Reducing Loneliness

German Strategy against Loneliness

Japanese Minister for Social Isolation and Loneliness

Responding to Social Isolation and Loneliness across the Life Course in **Korea**

Lithuanian initiatives to support social connections of the elderly

Netherlands Loneliness Programme

Spanish Ministry of Social Rights & Agenda 2030 forthcoming national strategy

Sweden Standing together – A national strategy to tackle loneliness

United Kingdom Minister for Loneliness and national strategy

Social connections integrated in **mental health** or **well-being initiatives**

International measurement and policy efforts

European Commission

GILC
Global Initiative on Loneliness and Connection

World Health Organization

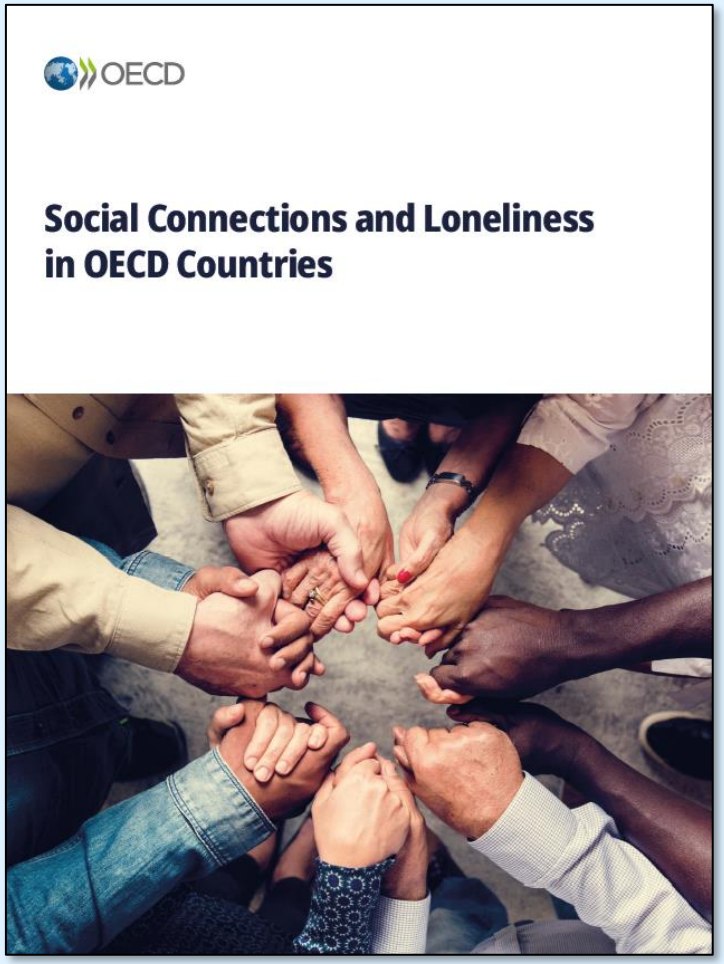
WHO Commission on Social Connection

United Nations Statistics Division

United Nations Friends of the Chair Group on Social and Demographic Statistics (**UN-FOCG-SD**), Institutions and Relationships Measurement Framework

UNECE

What does the report do?



- Most **complete picture** of the state of social connections across OECD countries, covering their **quantity and quality**
- Collate data from **high quality**, **large sample size** datasets
- Explore short- and medium-term **trends**
- Disaggregate outcomes by population group to **identify who is most vulnerable**

Key findings in brief

- Social connections are **strong** for most people in OECD countries, but **deprivations remain**
- Over the past decades, **in-person socialising declined** while remote connection with friends and family via **digital technology increased**
- There are signs that the **quality of connection has declined recently**, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic
- **Men and young people** have emerged as new at-risk groups
- **Older people**, those who **live alone**, and those with **fewer socio-economic resources** are also more at risk for disconnection
- Many interventions target lonely individuals – can **community-level solutions** work better?

Social connections are strong across OECD countries, but deprivations remain

95% of respondents in 38 OECD countries **interacted with friends or family** who live nearby over the past week

90% of respondents in 38 OECD countries have **someone to count on in times of need**

51% of respondents in 21 European OECD countries **never felt lonely over the past 4 weeks**

8% of respondents in 22 European OECD countries report having **no close friends**

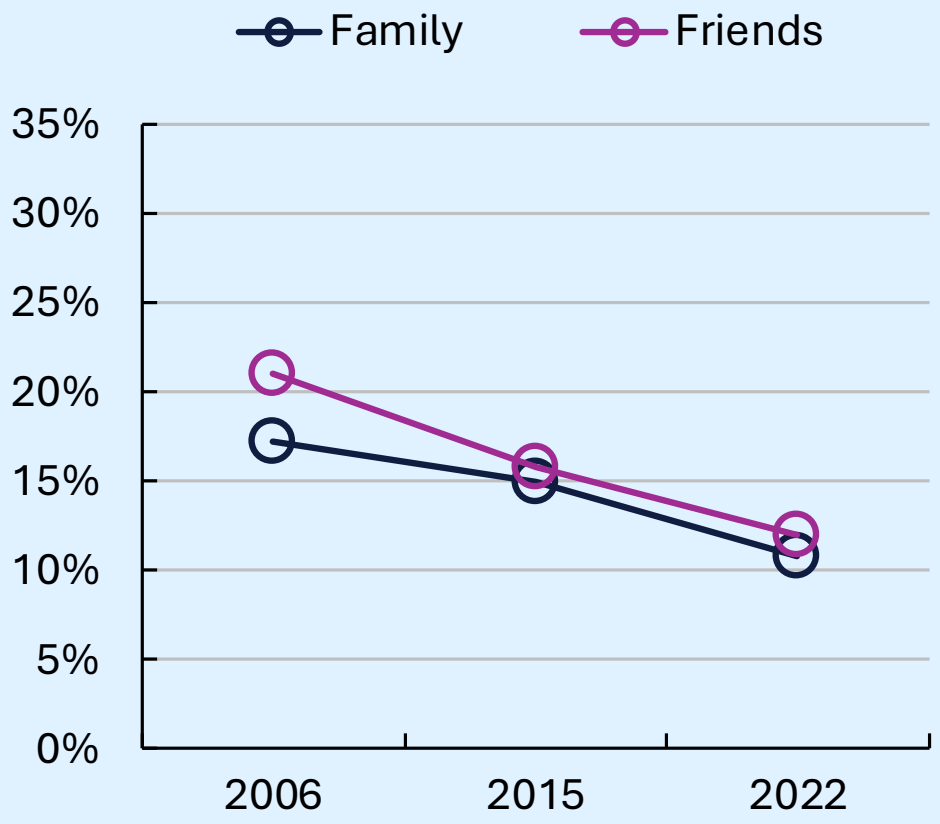
10% of people in 38 OECD countries feel **unsupported** by others

6% of respondents in 23 OECD countries felt **lonely most or all of the time over the past 4 weeks**

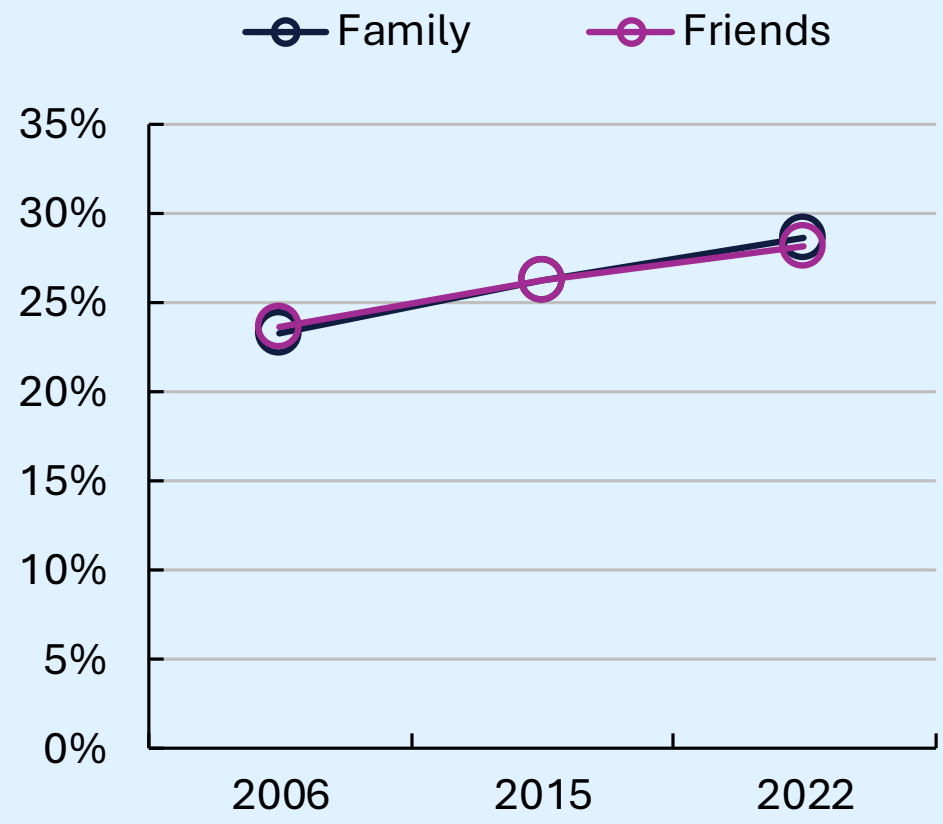
Note: Data refer to 2022 or closest year. Source: OECD (2025), *Social Connections and Loneliness in OECD Countries*. OECD Publishing, Paris.

People meet in-person less often than before, but are frequently in touch with friends and family via digital technology

Get together with friends or family **in person at least daily** in an average year, OECD EU-EFTA 21



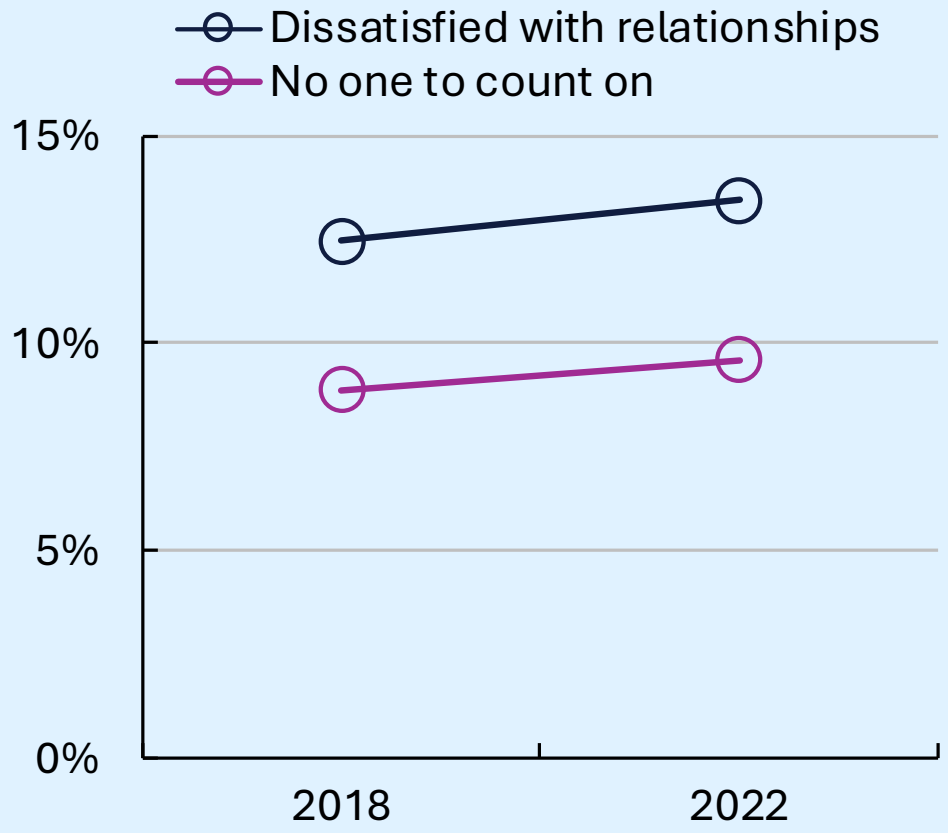
Contact friends or family **remotely at least daily** in an average year, OECD EU-EFTA 21



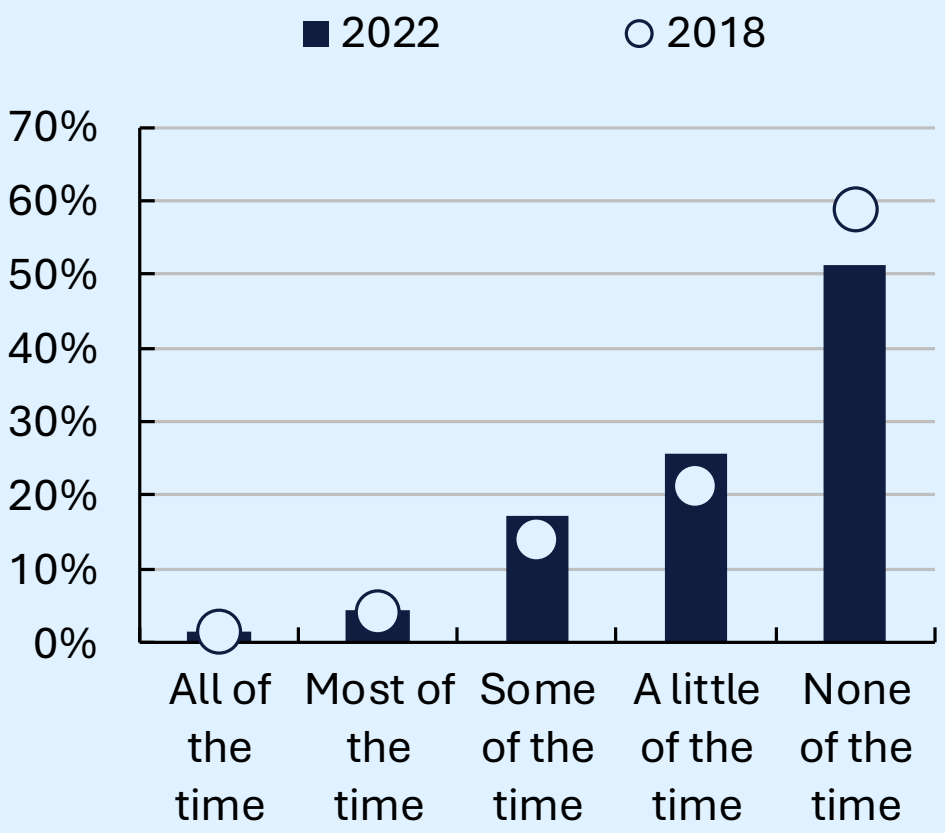
Source: OECD (2025), *Social Connections and Loneliness in OECD Countries*. OECD Publishing, Paris.

The quality of connection worsened in recent years, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

Have **no one to count on*** (OECD 38) and **dissatisfied with relationships** (OECD EU-EFTA 22)



Frequency of feeling **lonely** over the past four weeks (OECD EU-EFTA 22)

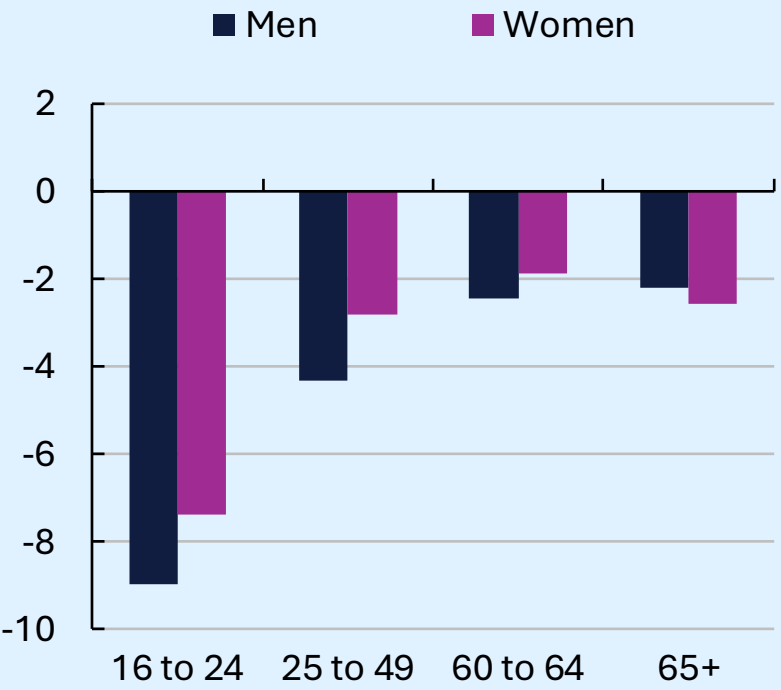


Note: *To ensure sufficiently large sample sizes, for "no one to count on" 2022 refers to a pooled average of 2022-23 and 2018 refers to a pooled average of 2017-19.

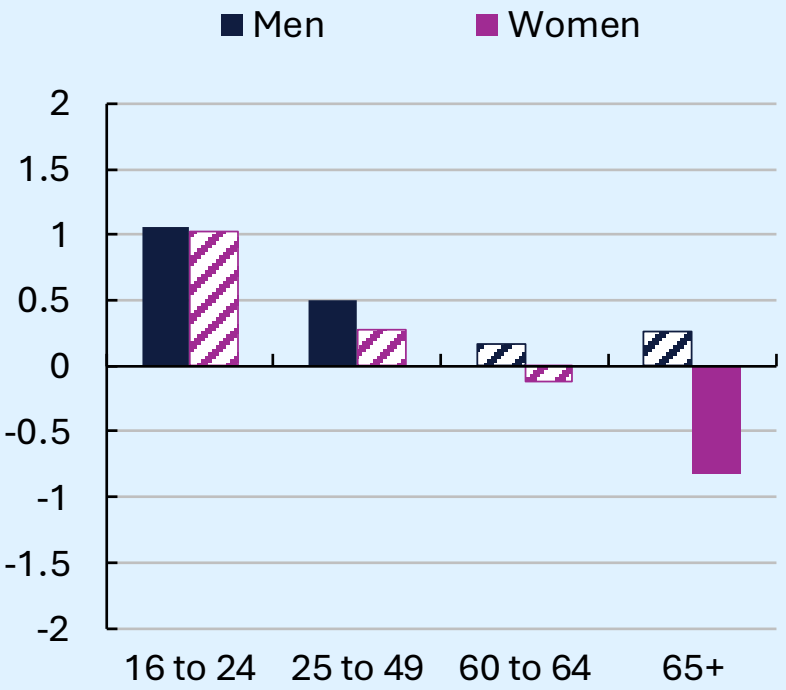
Source: OECD (2025), *Social Connections and Loneliness in OECD Countries*. OECD Publishing, Paris.

Newly vulnerable groups have emerged, including younger men

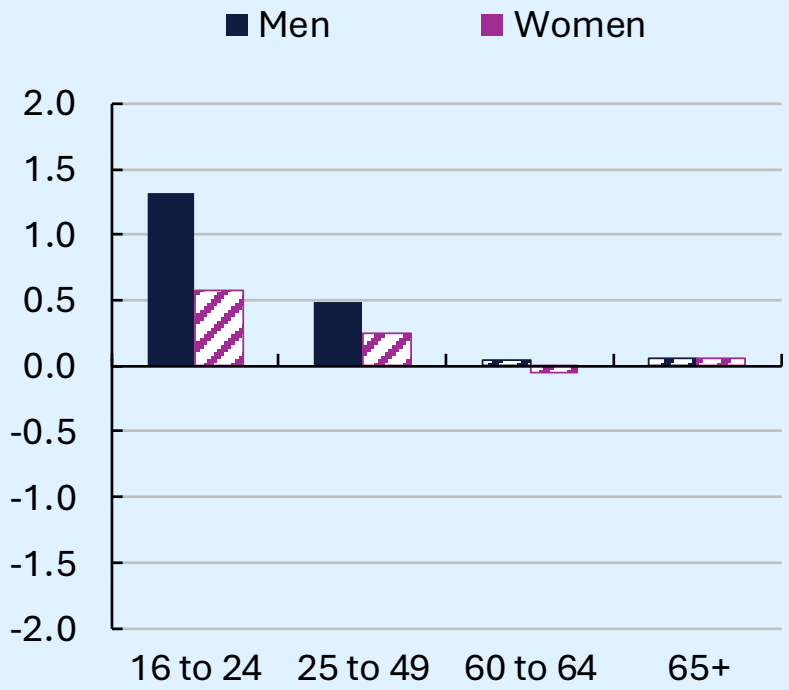
Percentage point change 2015 to 2022, **get together with friends daily** in an average year, OECD EU-EFTA 21



Percentage point change 2018 to 2022, **felt lonely** most or all of the time over the past 4 weeks, OECD EU-EFTA 22



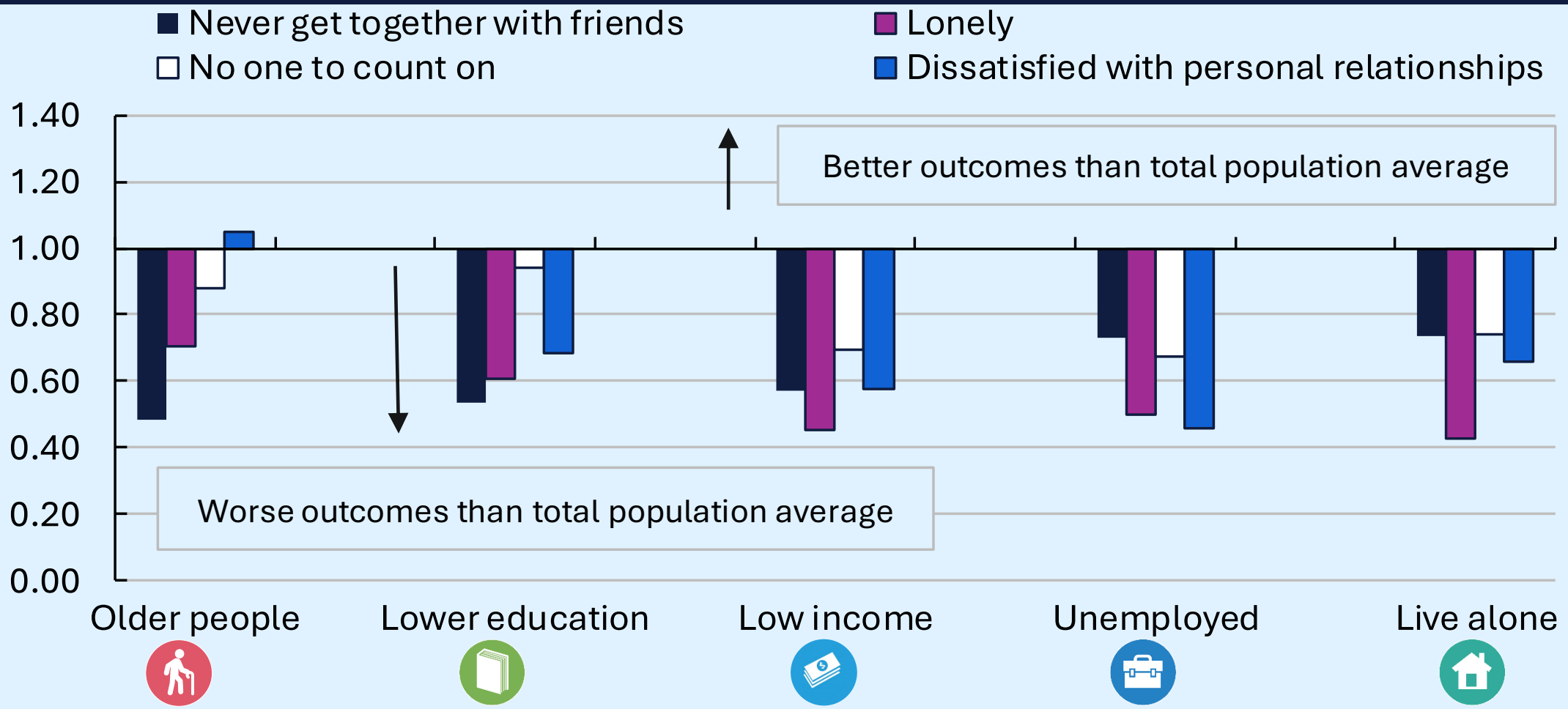
Percentage point change 2018 to 2022, **dissatisfied with personal relationships**, OECD EU-EFTA 22



Note: Bars with striped pattern fill indicate that the percentage point change over time is not statistically significant. All other differences are significant.

Source: OECD (2025), *Social Connections and Loneliness in OECD Countries*. OECD Publishing, Paris.

Older people, those who live alone, and those with fewer socio-economic resources are also more at risk for disconnection



Note: The figure depicts the ratio of the population group outcome compared to the total population average outcome, for each of four selected social connections outcomes. Latest available year refers to 2022 aside from "no one to count on" which refers to a pooled average of 2022-23 for education, income and live alone outcomes; and a pooled average of 2017-23 for age and education outcomes. Source: OECD (2025), *Social Connections and Loneliness in OECD Countries*. OECD Publishing, Paris.

Important questions for policy remain

- Policies can target the **upstream factors** that shape opportunities to connect
- Generate **more evidence** on community-level programmes
- What is the role of demographic transitions: **aging** populations, more people **living alone**, social lives moving **online**

The role of social infrastructure – physical spaces that lower the barrier to interactions – in promoting connection

Public institutions

Community organisations

Commercial establishments

Better understanding how digital technology affects the quality of social interactions

- Which **types** of digital technology use matter most for social connections?
- Does the **shift from real world to digital** interactions matter for the **quality** of connection?
- How effective are **efforts to regulate** young people's use of **social media and digital devices**, in terms of promoting positive online interactions?

Find out more

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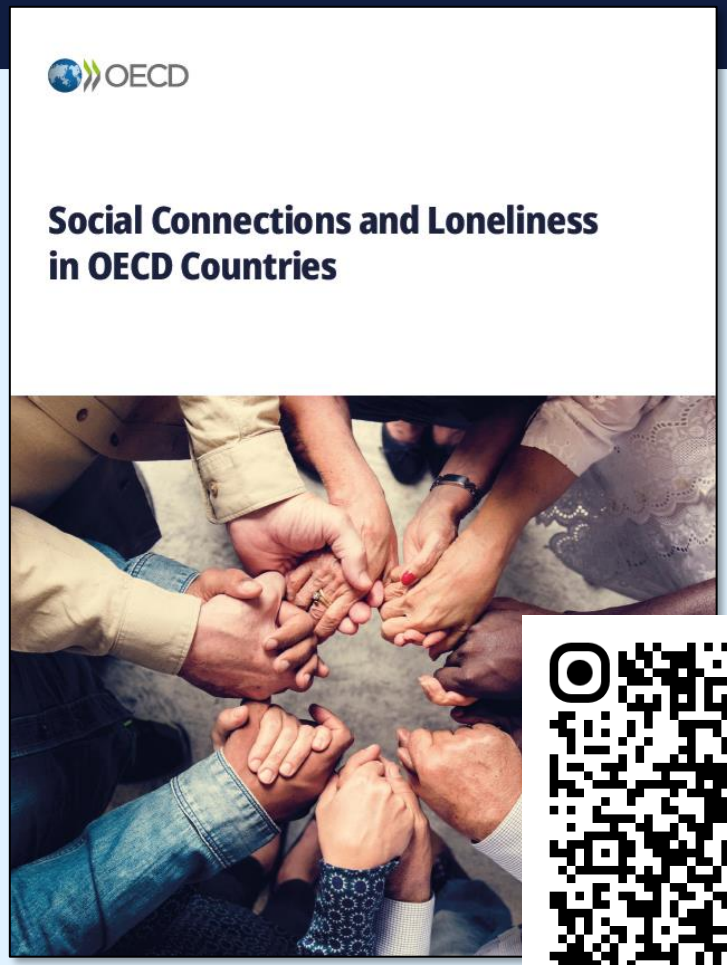

United Nations

SECOND WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
DOHA 2025

4 – 6 November 2025

https://social.desa.un.org/world-summit-2025

Social Connection as a Foundation for Inclusive Development: Implementing the WHO Commission's Call to Action

A joint session hosted by the OECD WISE Centre and the WHO Commission on Social Connection

World Health Organization

WHO Commission on Social Connection

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