

# Living in COVID Times - IDF Europe COVID & Diabetes Survey

## Experiences from People living with Diabetes



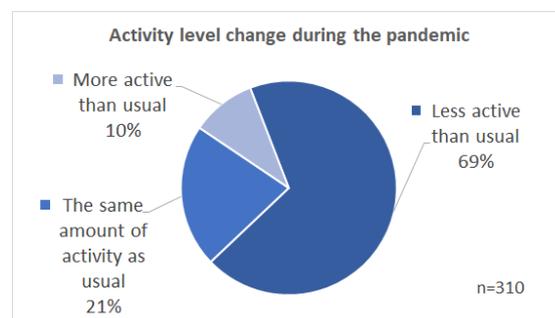
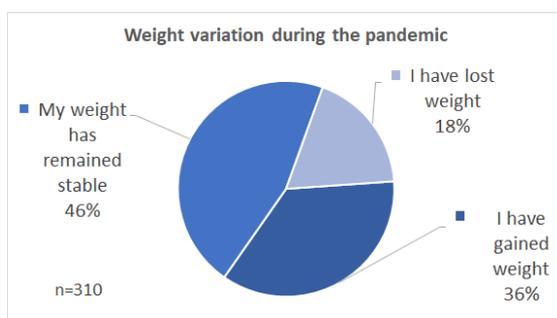
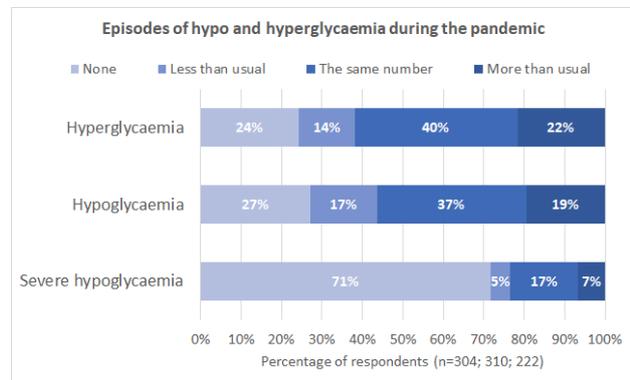
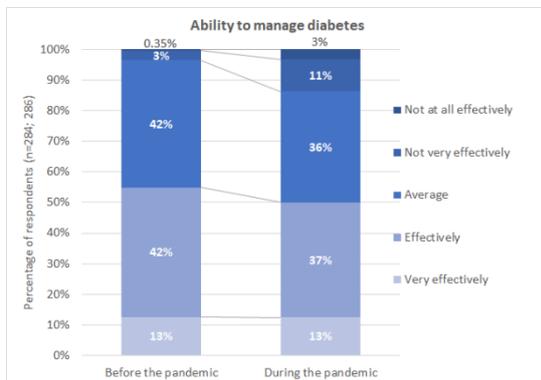
Portugal

### Summary

As elsewhere in Europe, the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on people living with diabetes (PwD) in Portugal. The number of PwD reporting issues in managing their diabetes increased. Feelings of anxiousness and low mood affected a majority of respondents. Physical activity levels dropped. Access to diabetes medicines, all but universal before the crisis, worsened for a number of respondents. Access to diabetes care – both routine as well as screening for complications – was adversely affected, with many appointments cancelled or rescheduled. Virtual healthcare solutions were available for a majority of the respondents and were well received by most, with a general openness to virtual consultations. Dedicated websites, social media and apps were increasingly used in relation to diabetes management. The lack of guidance was perceived as a central issue – one third of the respondents would have liked more virtual support, 41% did not receive any advice from their usual healthcare professionals (although this was low compared to many other European countries); 74% would have wanted to receive more diabetes-specific information and 32% more virtual support. While government sources remained essential during the pandemic, about half the respondents received information from their diabetes association.

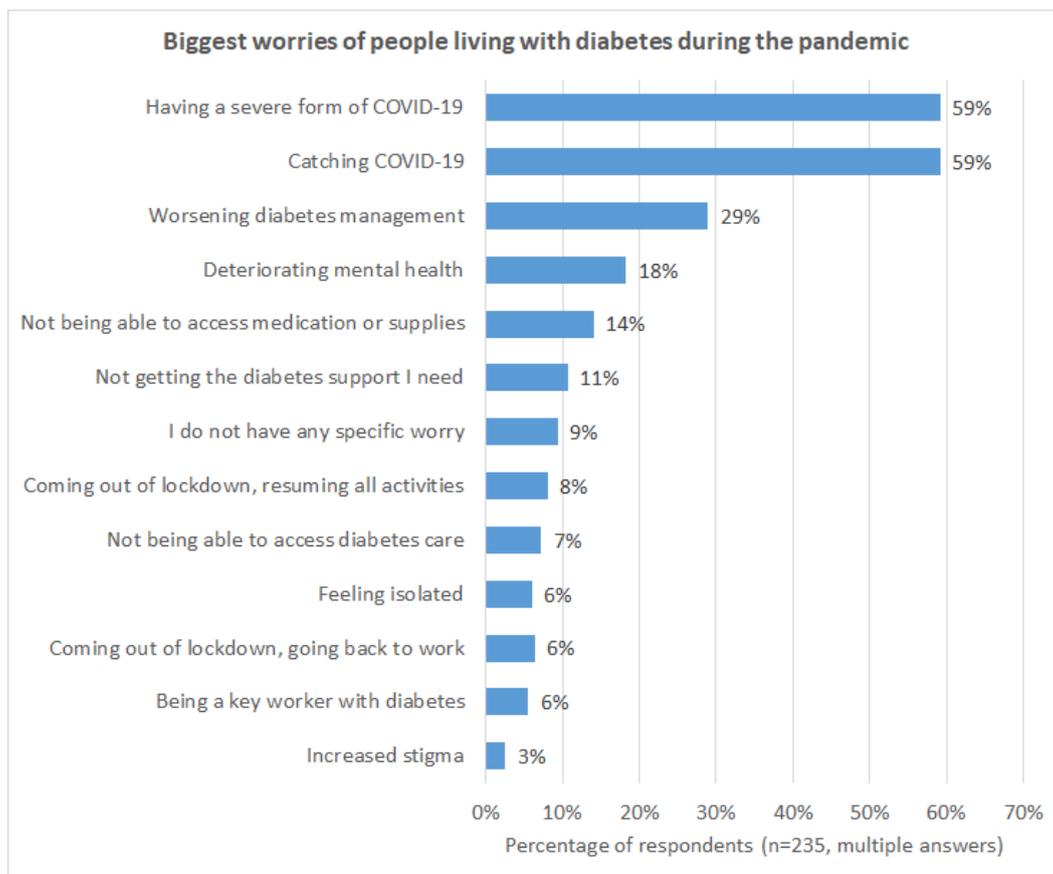
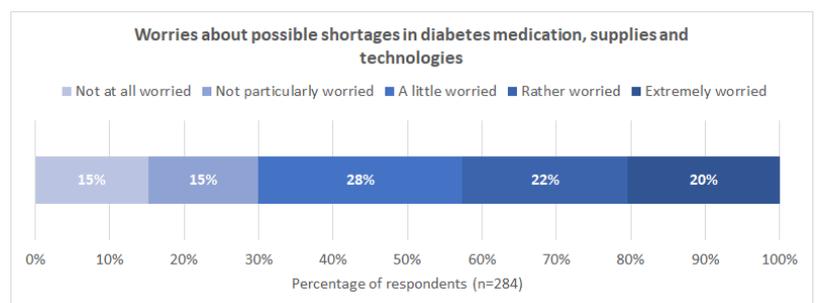
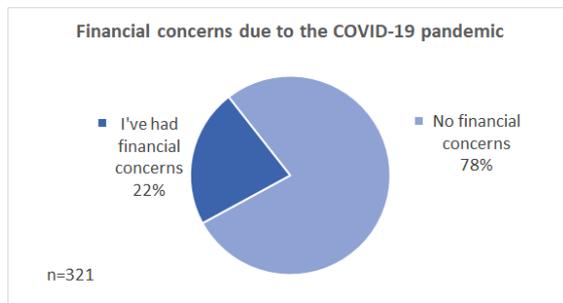
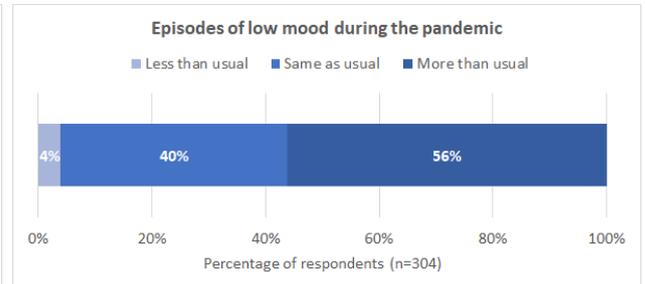
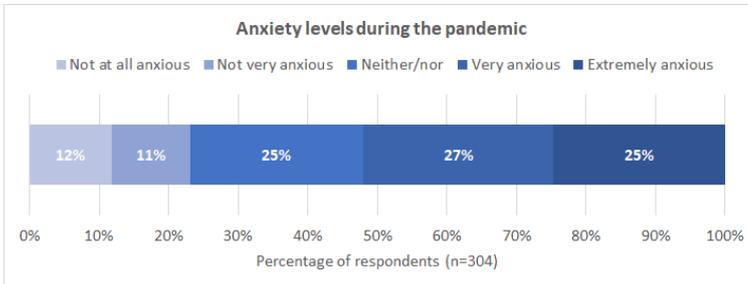
### Diabetes Management

In Portugal, 95% of PwD responding to the survey were able to follow their diabetes regimen as well as usual or better during the pandemic. The proportion of PwD rating their ability to manage their diabetes not effectively or not very effectively rose, however, from less than 4% to 14%. Physical activity levels plummeted. Some 69% of respondents reported exercising less and 36% gaining weight. Blood glucose variability rose (28% had more variable readings than usual), as did the reported frequency of hypo- and hyperglycaemic episodes.



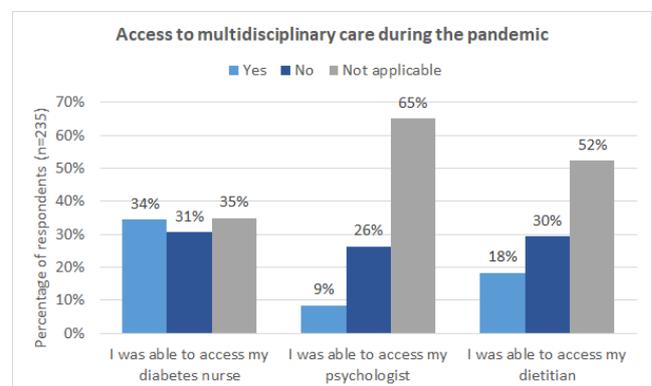
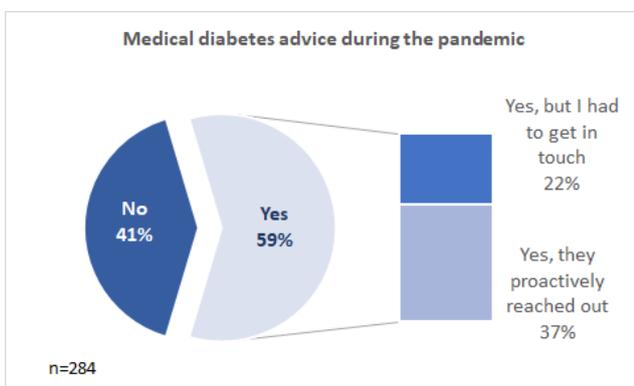
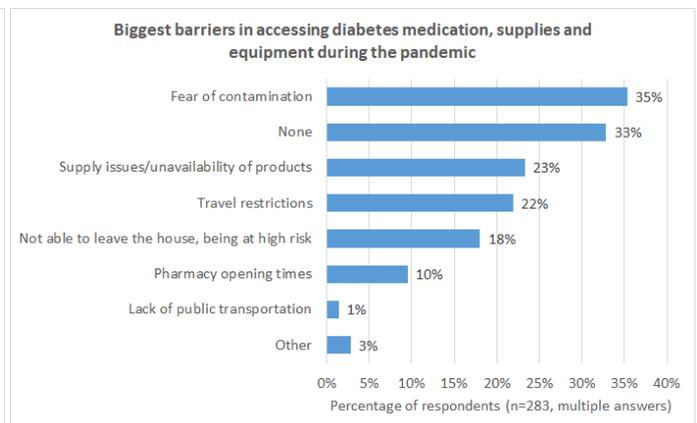
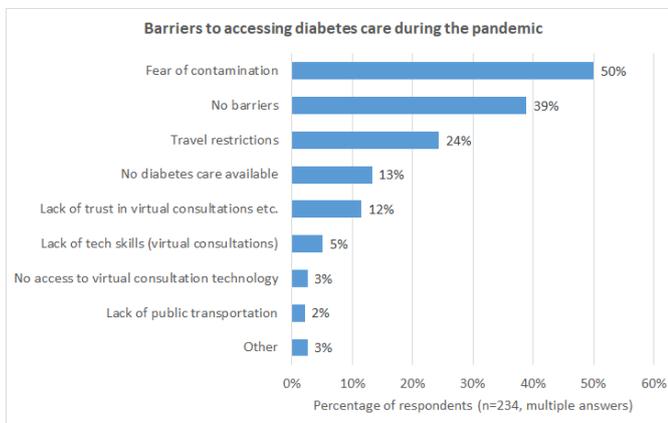
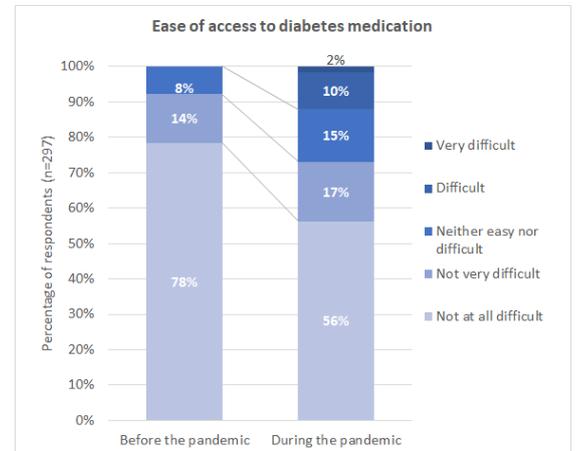
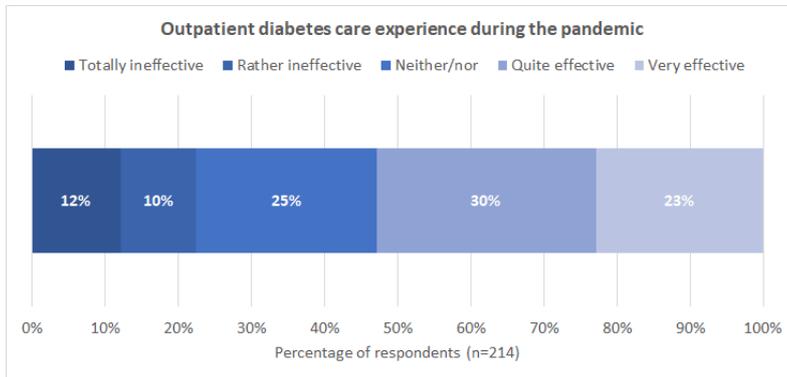
## Psychological Impact

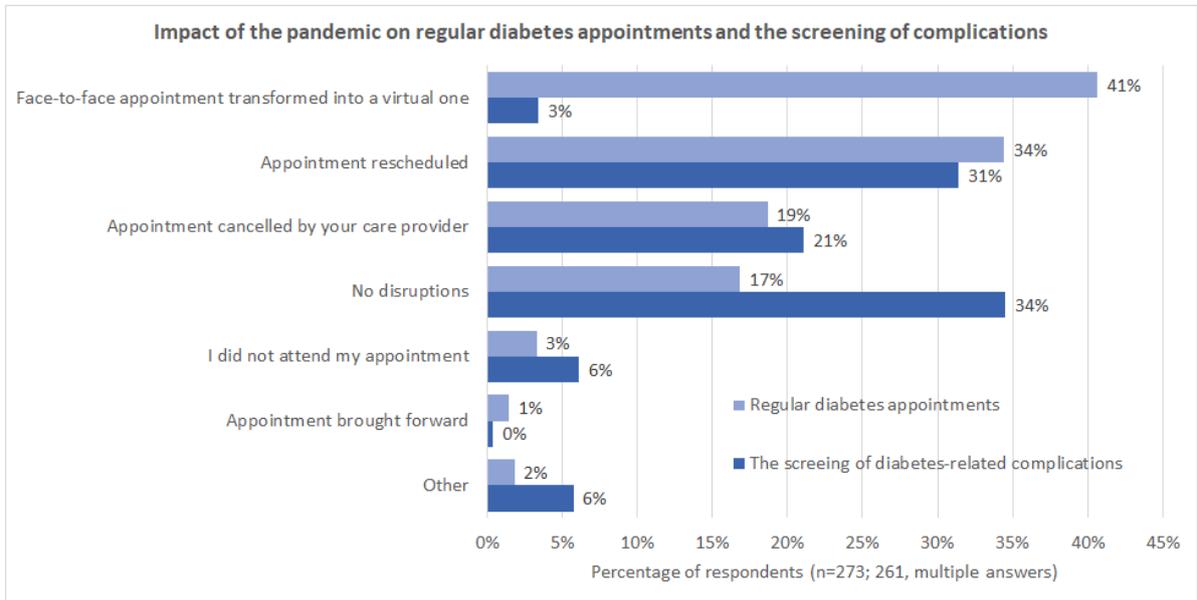
COVID-19 had a severe psychological impact on PwD across the world, and Portugal was no exception: 42% of respondents worried about shortages in medicines and supplies, 52% were more/much more anxious and 56% experienced more frequent episodes of low mood than usual. Catching COVID-19 and developing a severe form of the disease were the most frequently reported concerns. Respondents also feared their diabetes management would degrade. Twenty-two percent of the respondents reported experiencing financial concerns as a result of the pandemic, adding to existing material and psychological difficulties. This was broadly in keeping with many other European countries.



## Access to Medicines, Supplies, Technologies, and Care

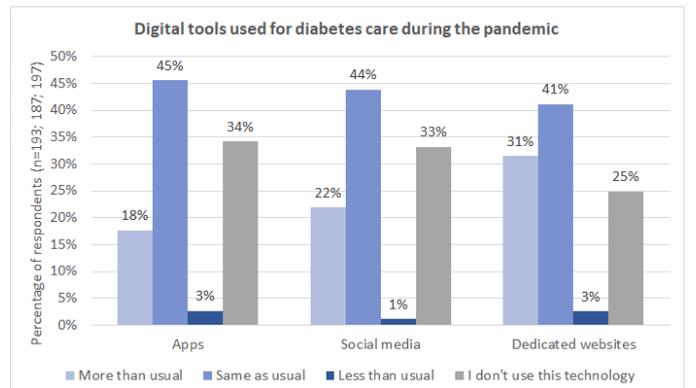
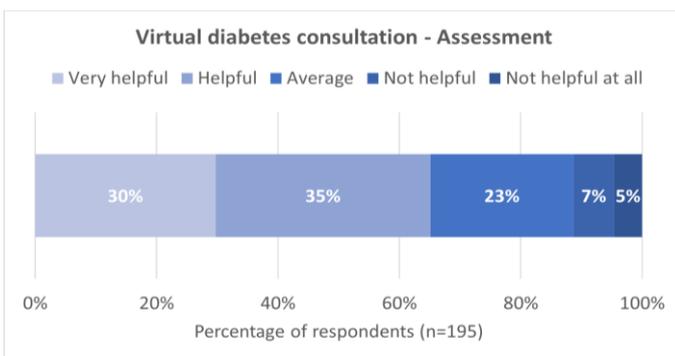
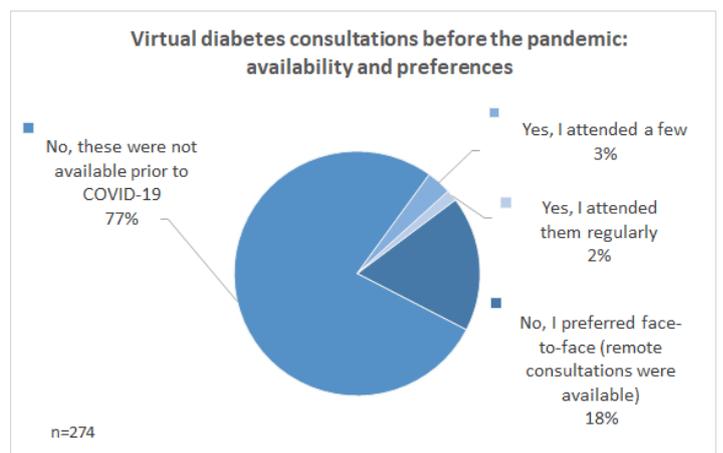
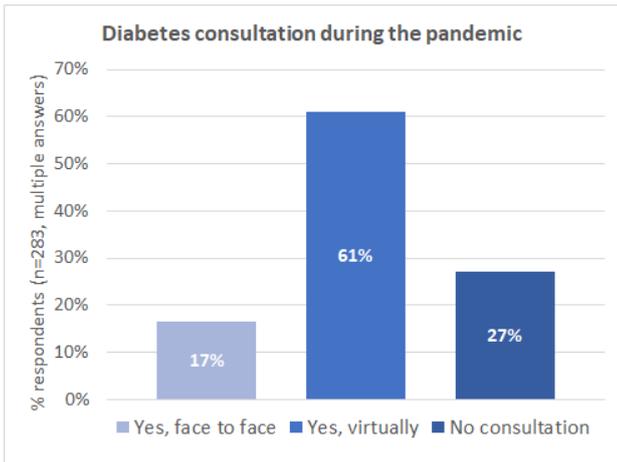
The COVID-19 pandemic caused issues in accessing medicines, supplies, and technologies in Portugal. Twelve percent of the respondents indicated experiencing some degree of difficulty in obtaining these essentials, whereas this was the case for less than one percent prior to the pandemic. PwD in Portugal also reported significant issues accessing care, with many appointments being rescheduled or cancelled. Fear of COVID-19 contamination was the most frequently cited cause of a limited access to supplies and care. Availability issues and travel restrictions were also cited as factors thereof.

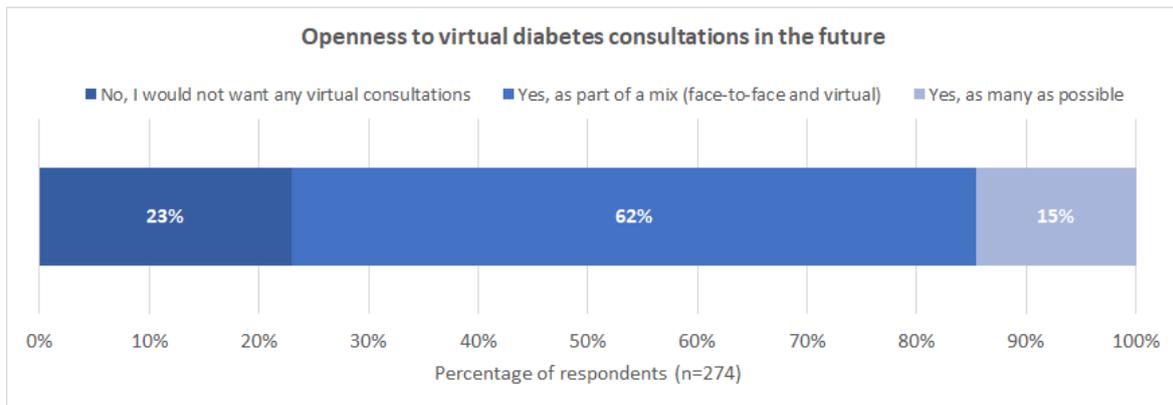




## E-health

With the COVID-19 crisis, virtual consultations were quickly rolled out, and a majority (61%) of survey respondents availed themselves of one, while only 17% could attend a face-to-face consultation. This was a huge increase compared to pre-COVID times, when virtual consultations had been experienced by just 5%. The technology used for such remote consultations was the phone in almost all cases. Such consultations seemed to be well received by PwD attending them and were deemed helpful or very helpful by 65% of the respondents who attended one. Overall, more than three quarters of PwD indicated that they would consider attending virtual consultation in the future (62% as part of a mix of face-to-face and virtual consultations). Usage of online sources to support diabetes care increased a lot during the crisis, in particular for dedicated websites.





## Background

This country profile was developed as part of ‘Living in COVID times’, an online survey conducted by IDF Europe between August and October 2020. It collected answers from 3,480 people living with diabetes across 32 countries in Europe and aimed to understand how the COVID-19 crisis affected PwD’s lives and their diabetes care. In Portugal, 337 people responded to the survey, a few of them parents or caregivers and most themselves living with diabetes. Type 1 and type 2 diabetes were well represented (56% and 42% of respondents, respectively). Most respondents were between 41 and 70 years old and gender representation was balanced, with 54% women and 46% men. The median time respondents had been living with diabetes was between 11 and 20 years, and the answers covered a broad spectrum and reflected a variety of situations.

The Europe-wide report “Living in COVID times” can be found [here](#).

If you wish to share a testimonial of your life with diabetes in Portugal during the pandemic, write to [idfeurope@idf-europe.org](mailto:idfeurope@idf-europe.org). We look forward to hearing from you!



**International  
Diabetes Federation  
Europe**