

Taking on social issues through business: Loneliness and social isolation (Part 2)

# Loneliness and social isolation as a factor/ phenomenon, and initiatives by public and private sectors





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# Introduction

Do you ever think about loneliness?

If you are currently living a life free from loneliness, do you ever imagine what it's like to feel lonely or isolated? Do you ever think about people suffering from loneliness or social isolation?

Sociologist Elyakim Kislev, using an analysis of data collected in more than 30 countries, indicates that while the fear of loneliness drives people to marry, the presence of a spouse does not necessarily reduce loneliness. On the contrary, he claims that single people are more resistant to loneliness as they get older.<sup>1</sup>

Thanks to the 'miracle of modern medical science', the human lifespan has significantly extended. This means that years of life alone after divorce or the death of a partner have become longer, too. As a result, a study in 30 countries that asks how much of the time during the past week respondents felt lonely found that, at the age of 78, those who have never been married feel less lonely than those who have.<sup>2,3</sup>

Kislev concludes that marriages end in one of the following tragedies: (1) divorce, (2) the death of a partner or (3) one's own death. People who have been divorced or have lost their spouse tend to experience a stronger sense of loneliness and unhappiness, compared to those who have never been married or who have been in a happy marriage.

Kislev hypothesises that these tendencies may be because people who have been married are likely to think in a family-centred manner. By contrast, people who have never been married may have a greater tolerance for living alone, as they have been living their lives without excessively depending on a partner for decision-making etc.

There is data in Japan that supports his thoughts. In the OECD's survey on the frequency of contact with friends, colleagues or others in social groups, Japan was the country with the highest percentage of respondents who

reported socialising with others only 'rarely'.<sup>4</sup> According to the survey, the Japanese respondents tended to socialise less with non-family members once they married.

This survey was conducted in 2005, and the data is somewhat older. However, such family-centred behaviour among the married has traditionally been recognised as a 'virtue' in Japan. Therefore, if a similar survey were conducted today, 18 years later than the original survey, the results would probably not show much difference.

Because data comparing the frequency of social interaction before and after marriage is not presented in the book, how an individual's personality affects the results is a matter of speculation. However, Kislev finds that the reduction in social interaction due to marriage increases the risk of future loneliness and raises the lifetime unmarried rate. This is why he advocates that the time has come for society to embrace the 'selectively single' way of life. What we want to discuss here is whether a proper understanding of loneliness and social isolation can alleviate some of our anxieties about the future.

To varying degrees, we all live at close quarters with loneliness and social isolation. Nevertheless, in reality, some can (somehow) manage to avoid loneliness and social isolation or deal with such feelings and environments while others are overwhelmed by loneliness and socially isolated. What are the factors that separate the two?

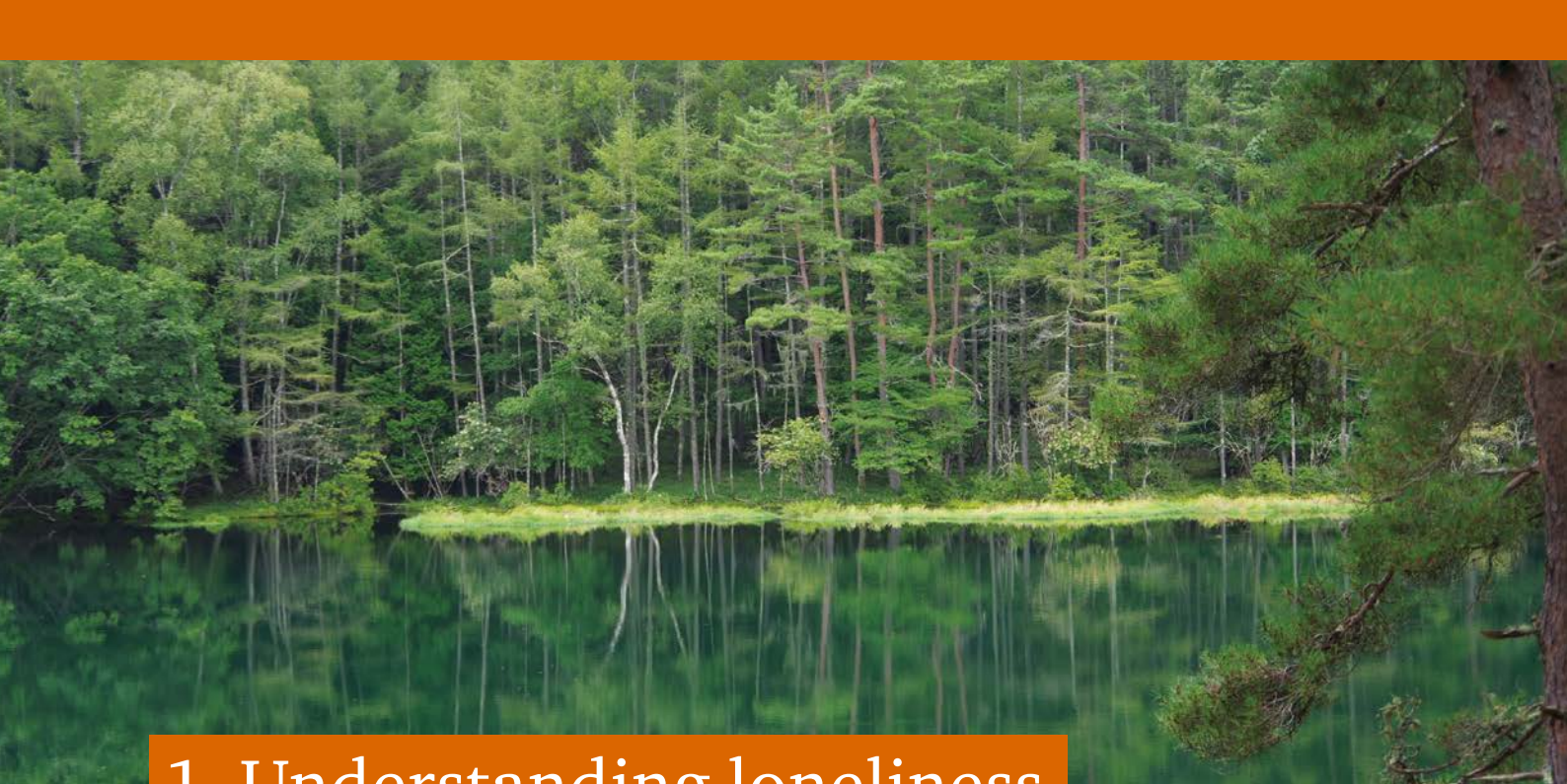
Based on official insights from each country and research papers, this article delves deeper into the factors that lead to loneliness and social isolation, and the social risks in serious situations. Then, we look at how government and private bodies in Japan and abroad are currently dealing with this social problem.

1 Elyakim Kislev, *Happy Singlehood: The Rising Acceptance and Celebration of Solo Living*, University of California Press, 2019.

2 The 'ever-married' group in this survey includes individuals whose marriage ends in divorce, separation or widowhood, in addition to those who are still married.

3 Elyakim Kislev, 'Aging, Marital Status, and Loneliness: Multilevel Analyses of 30 Countries', Hipatia Press, 2022.

4 Japan was tied with Belgium for second place (1.7%) in the percentage of respondents who 'never' spend time with others, behind only Mexico (4.7%).  
OECD, *Society at a Glance 2005*, p.83.



# 1. Understanding loneliness and social isolation

According to the ‘Basic Survey on People’s Connections’ conducted by the Cabinet Secretariat in 2022, the generation with the highest percentage of respondents who ‘often’ or ‘always’ feel lonely is those in their 30s (7.2%). Meanwhile, the generation with the lowest percentage is those aged 80 and over (2.3%) (Figure 1).<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, in the US, loneliness is a serious concern among younger generations. A survey shows that the percentage of the group aged between 18 and 24 who feels lonely (79%) is about twice as many as that aged 66 and over (41%). Elsewhere, among those surveyed, more than two out of five aged between 18 and 34 feel that they are ‘always left out’ by others. By contrast, only 16% of those aged 55 and over feel the same way.<sup>6</sup>

When looking at the results by gender, 59% of women reported loneliness compared to 57% of men; in terms of gender, there were no differences in the feeling of loneliness in the US. With regard to factors other than age and gender, the survey results show that Hispanic and African American adults, who are often overlooked in US society, are more likely to feel lonely (Figure 2).

On the other hand, a survey conducted in the EU on the seriousness of loneliness by gender shows that the

percentage of women that feel lonely is larger than that of men. More specifically, when looking at age, women feel most lonely at the age of 18, and the percentage of women reporting loneliness decreases with age, while men feel most lonely at the age of 43.<sup>7</sup>

A similar survey by region (Eastern, Western, Northern and Southern Europe) indicates that the percentage of people feeling lonely is largest in Eastern Europe, where the percentage of socially isolated people is larger than any other region (33.4%). The results of this survey highlighted the relationship between national identity and loneliness/social isolation in each country/region. However, it is also an interesting trend that, in all regions, the percentage of socially isolated people was greater than that of people who feel severely lonely (Figure 3).<sup>8</sup>

The report concludes that one of the reasons for the severity of loneliness in Southern and Eastern European countries is a current trend in which previously strong family ties are fading. With regard to social isolation, however, it states that the quality of social interaction is more important than the frequency, which the survey measured. The report also concludes that not all the people classified as socially isolated based on their frequency of social interaction are necessarily lonely.

5 Results of a survey conducted nationwide in 2022 of 20,000 individuals aged 16 and over. Summary of Basic Survey on People’s Connections in 2022, Cabinet Secretariat (viewed 3 August 2023). [https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/kodoku\\_koritsu\\_taisaku/zittai\\_tyosa/r4\\_zenkoku\\_tyosa/tyosakekka\\_gaiyo.pdf](https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/kodoku_koritsu_taisaku/zittai_tyosa/r4_zenkoku_tyosa/tyosakekka_gaiyo.pdf)

6 The CIGNA group, ‘The Loneliness Epidemic Persists: A Post-Pandemic Look at the State of Loneliness among U.S. Adults’ (viewed 28 August 2023). <https://newsroom.thecignagroup.com/loneliness-epidemic-persists-post-pandemic-look>

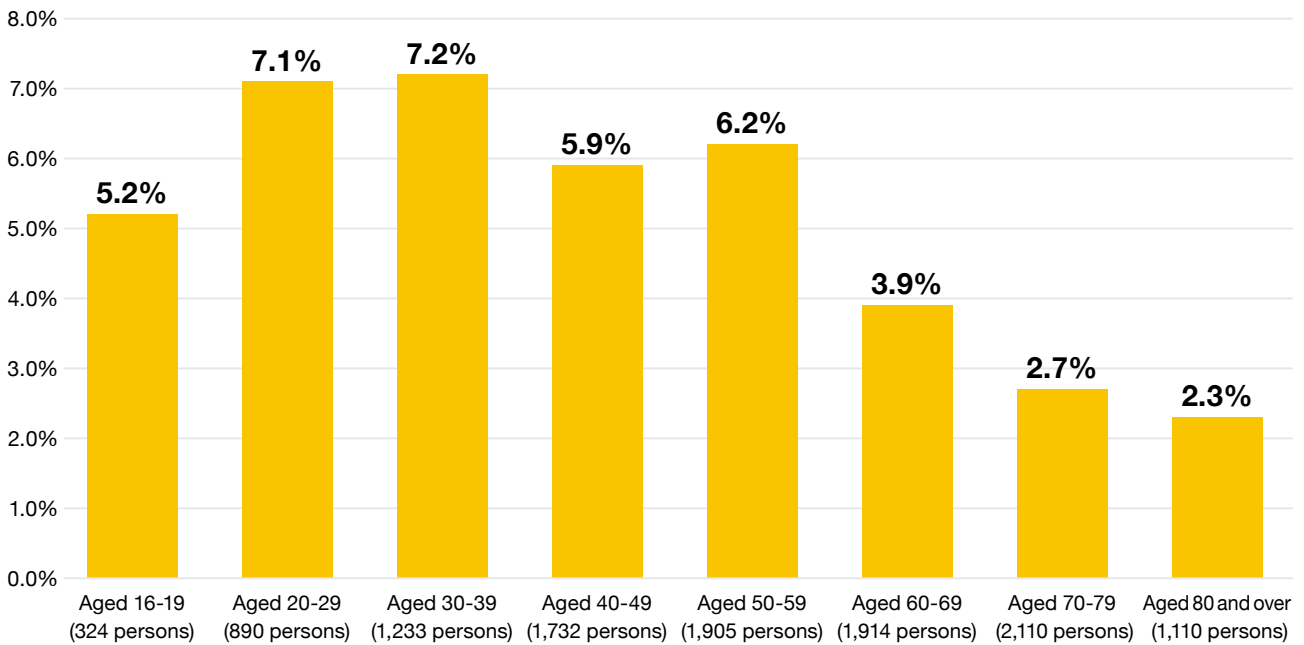
7 European Commission, ‘Loneliness and social connectedness: Insights from a new EU-wide survey’ (viewed 30 May, 2023). <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC133351>

8 European Commission, ‘Loneliness – an unequally shared burden in Europe’ (viewed 28 August 2023). [https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fairness\\_pb2018\\_loneliness\\_jrc\\_i1.pdf](https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fairness_pb2018_loneliness_jrc_i1.pdf)

Are these differences in trends really country- or region-specific? Or are each of these elements common, to some extent, to all people living in society, despite some differences depending on the surrounding environment?

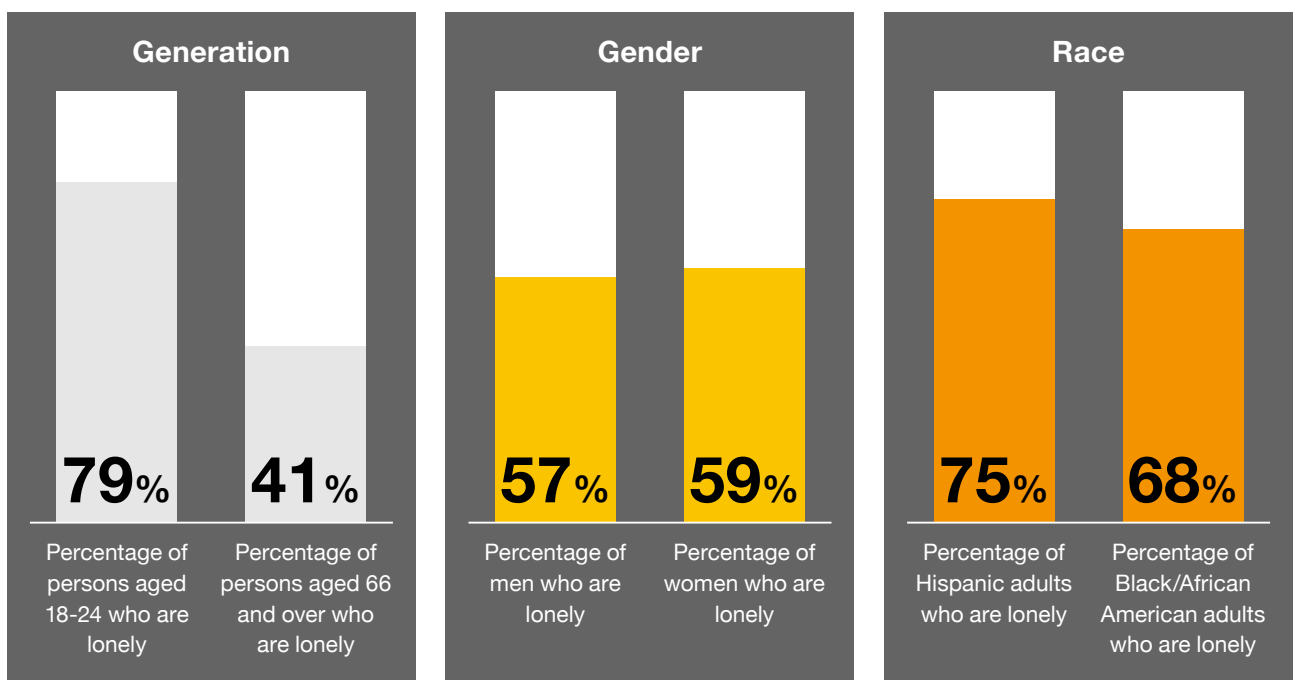
In order to seek answers to these questions, we will look at what factors cause loneliness and social isolation, along with social risks that may be caused by them.

**Figure 1: Percentage of people who feel lonely 'often' / 'always' by age group (Japan, n=11,218)**



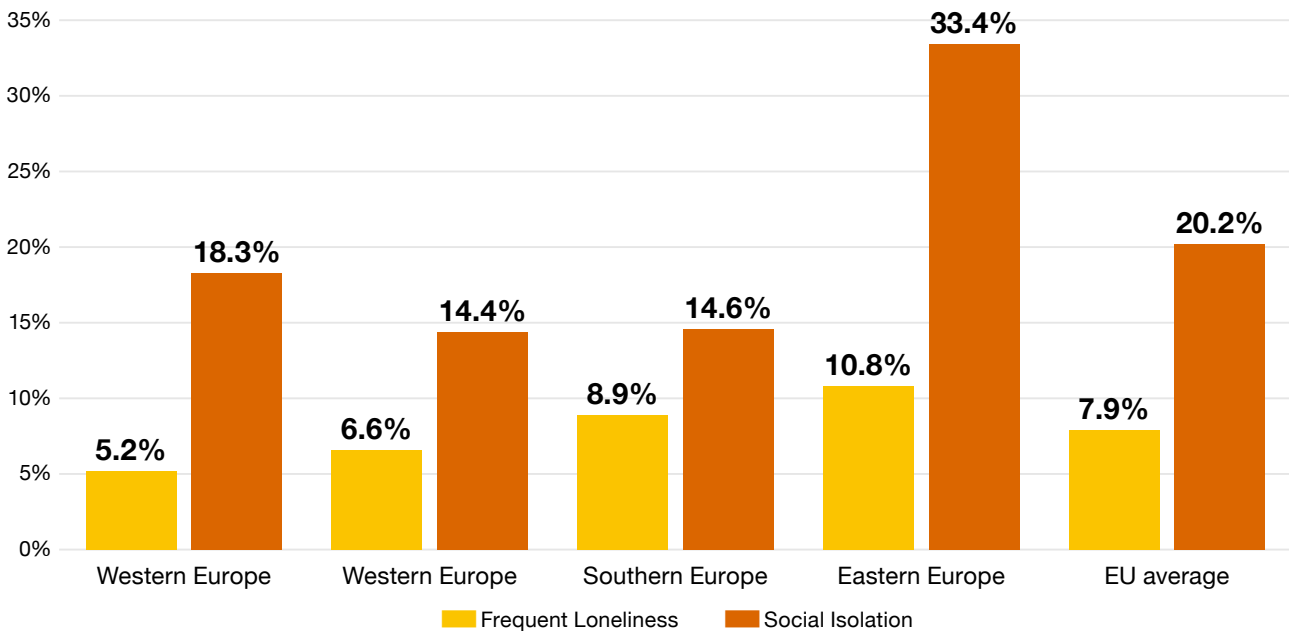
Source: Created by PwC based on the results of the 'National Survey on Isolation and Loneliness (2022)', Cabinet Secretariat

**Figure 2: Actual state of loneliness (US, n=2,496)**



Source: Created by PwC based on CIGNA Group reports

**Figure 3: Prevalence of frequent loneliness and social isolation by region (24 EU member states, n=106,000+)**



Source: Created by PwC based on EU report<sup>9</sup>

### Factors that cause loneliness

We generally feel loneliness because of (1) disconnection from our surroundings, (2) isolation from our surroundings, (3) lack of understanding from our surroundings, (4) absence of people who care about us or with whom we can talk and (5) feelings of sadness. Furthermore, we tend to feel loneliness when physical changes due to a decrease in (6) concentration, (7) appetite, (8) sleep and (9) energy level etc. are manifested.<sup>10</sup>

The triggers for feeling loneliness are not uniform, as it is related to the way individuals feel and perceive things. However, factors that can be analysed from statistics include 'physical loneliness', which occurs when people move to a new place, divorce or are separated from

loved ones, as well as 'mental loneliness', which is caused by loneliness as a symptom of depression and other mental illness, low self-esteem<sup>11</sup> or an introverted personality.<sup>12</sup>

It has been pointed out that loneliness may cause symptoms of depression, and a depressed person may become reclusive and socially isolated.

Some consider the following to be the three most common categories of loneliness:<sup>13</sup>

- Emotional loneliness: Lack of significant relationships
- Social loneliness: Perceived lack of quality social relationships
- Existential loneliness: Essential detachment from others and the broader world

9 European Commission, 'Loneliness – an unequally shared burden in Europe' (viewed 28 August 2023). [https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fairness\\_pb2018\\_loneliness\\_jrc\\_i1.pdf](https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fairness_pb2018_loneliness_jrc_i1.pdf)

10 MEDICAL NEWS TODAY, 'What is loneliness, and how can a person cope with it?' (viewed 25 August 2023). <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/loneliness>

11 People with low self-esteem may isolate themselves by assuming themselves unworthy of others' attention, which can lead to chronic feelings of loneliness. Reasons for low self-esteem include illness, disabilities and other poor health conditions, as well as educational background. In the US survey, 23% of those with a high school diploma or lower (507 respondents), 25% of those with a two-year college degree (389 respondents), 17% of those with a four-year college degree (229 respondents) and 14% of those with a graduate degree (129 respondents) reported feeling lonely 'Always' or 'Often', indicating a difference between those with four-year college or graduate degrees and those with other types of education. The percentages of respondents who reported having '0' close friends were greatest among those with a high school diploma or lower, at 31%, 15%, 16% and 10% (the percentages of having '0' friends were 21%, 12%, 10% and 6%, respectively). On the other hand, one survey shows that one of the factors that contributes to isolation from the community in Japan is 'Having graduated from university or graduate school'.

US survey: YouGov 'Friendship' (viewed 25 August 2023). [https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus\\_uploads/document/m97e4vdjnu/Results%20for%20YouGov%20RealTime%20\(Friendship\)%20164%205.7.2019.xlsx%20%20%5BGroup%5D.pdf](https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/m97e4vdjnu/Results%20for%20YouGov%20RealTime%20(Friendship)%20164%205.7.2019.xlsx%20%20%5BGroup%5D.pdf)

Japan survey: Cabinet Office, White Paper on the National Lifestyle 2007 (viewed 19 September 2023). [https://warp.da.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/9990748/www5.cao.go.jp/seikatsu/whitepaper/h19/10\\_pdf/01\\_honpen/pdf/07sh\\_0201\\_1.pdf](https://warp.da.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/9990748/www5.cao.go.jp/seikatsu/whitepaper/h19/10_pdf/01_honpen/pdf/07sh_0201_1.pdf)

12 Verywell Mind, 'Loneliness: Causes and Health Consequences' (viewed 15 August 2023). <https://www.verywellmind.com/loneliness-causes-effects-and-treatments-2795749>

13 Campaign to End Loneliness, 'Facts and statistics about loneliness' (viewed 29 August 2023). <https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/facts-and-statistics/>



In addition to these personal experiences, many studies and surveys indicate that social and economic factors, such as poverty, unemployment, discrimination,<sup>14</sup> lack of (social) support and excessive use of social media, also increase risks of both loneliness and social isolation.

### Factors that cause social isolation

A number of commonalities have been identified in terms of the factors that cause loneliness and social isolation.

For example, problems such as mental illness, deaths of loved ones, excessive dependence on social media, unemployment, poverty, physical disabilities and living at a distance from family and friends have been found to be factors that cause social isolation as well as loneliness.

In some cases, when people have been abused by someone close to them,<sup>15</sup> they are 'forced' to isolate themselves from society because they are made to believe that they need to hide their true situation.

### Risk

The health damage due to loneliness is said to be comparable to smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and has been associated with an increased risk of developing

coronary heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure and the onset of disability.<sup>16</sup> In addition, a number of studies have indicated that loneliness may have serious health consequences, including altered brain function and Alzheimer's disease progression. Furthermore, it may contribute to symptoms such as alcohol and drug abuse, antisocial behaviour, decreased memory and learning, depression, suicide, increased stress levels and poor decision-making.<sup>17</sup>

These risks due to loneliness also apply to social isolation that accompanies loneliness.

The World Health Organization (WHO) warns that 'social isolation and loneliness among older people are harmful' and they may 1) shorten their lives, 2) damage their physical and mental health and 3) reduce their quality of life.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, it has been indicated that social isolation, like loneliness, is also associated with 1) increased risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure and the onset of disability; 2) adverse effects on mental health, such as depression and suicide,<sup>19</sup> diabetes and the onset of infectious diseases<sup>20</sup> and 3) the risk of developing dementia in older people.<sup>21</sup>



14 Moultrie County Health Department, 'The Loneliness Epidemic: Are We Willing to Solve this Problem?' (viewed 1 September 2023). <https://www.moultriehealth.org/health-services/adult/the-loneliness-epidemic-are-we-willing-to-solve-this-problem/>

15 Tulane University, 'Understanding the Effects of Social Isolation on Mental Health' (viewed 15 August 2023). <https://publichealth.tulane.edu/blog/effects-of-social-isolation-on-mental-health/>

16 Relationships Australia, 'The Australian experience of loneliness' (viewed 29 August 2023). <https://relationships.org.au/the-australian-experience-of-loneliness/>

17 Verywell Mind, 'Loneliness: Causes and Health Consequences' (viewed 29 August 2023). <https://www.verywellmind.com/loneliness-causes-effects-and-treatments-2795749>

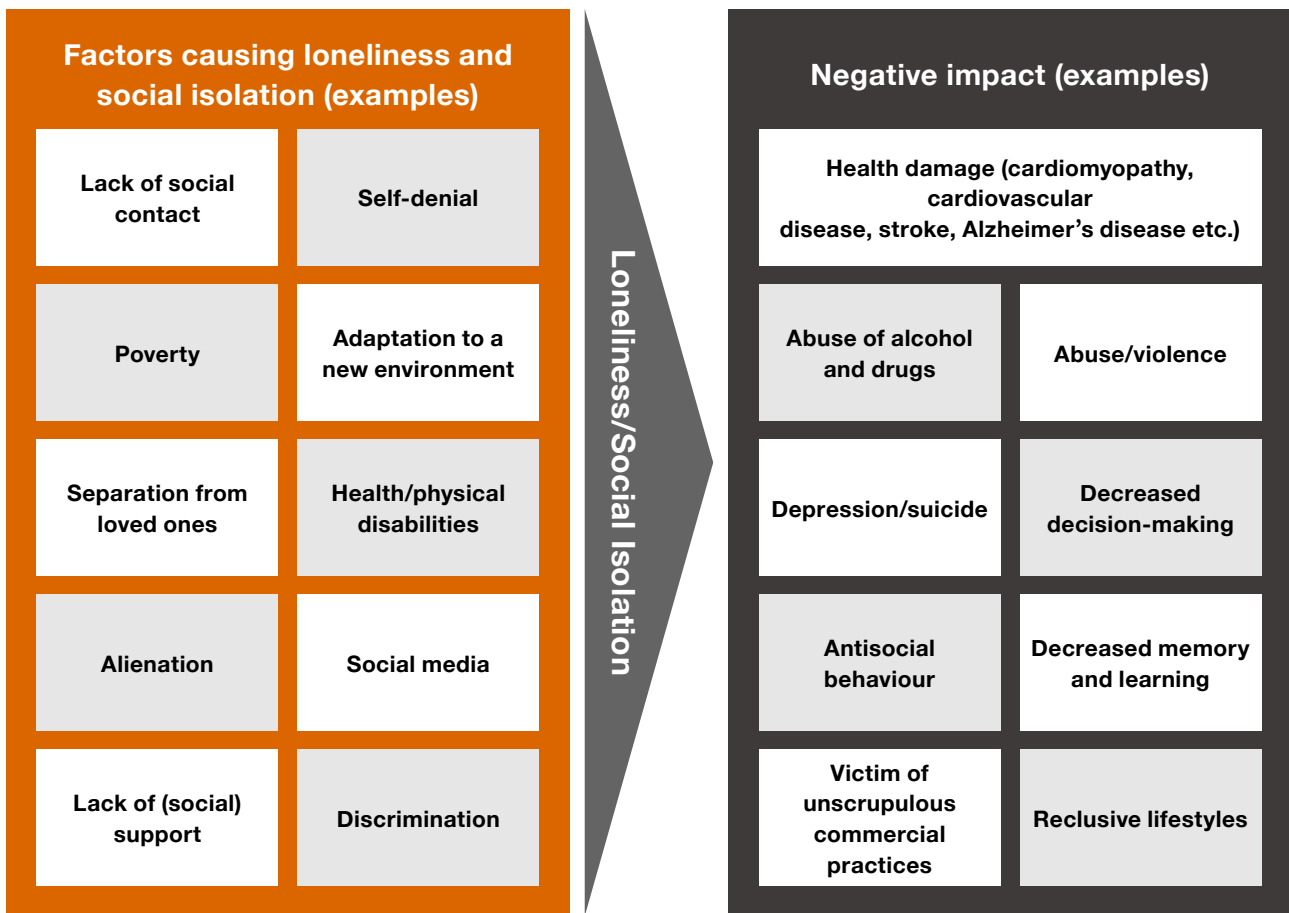
18 World Health Organization, 'Social Isolation and Loneliness' (viewed 6 June 2023). <https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/demographic-change-and-healthy-ageing/social-isolation-and-loneliness>

19 Relationships Australia, 'What causes social isolation?' (viewed 25 August 2023). <https://www.raq.org.au/blog/what-causes-social-isolation>

20 The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community, 'Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation' (viewed 15 August 2023). <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

21 Johns Hopkins Medicine, 'New Studies Suggest Social Isolation Is a Risk Factor for Dementia in Older Adults, Point to Ways to Reduce Risk' (viewed 15 August 2023). <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/news/newsroom/news-releases/new-studies-suggest-social-isolation-is-a-risk-factor-for-dementia-in-olderadults-point-to-ways-to-reduce-risk>

**Figure 4: Factors (examples) causing loneliness and social isolation and their negative impact (examples)**



Source: Created by PwC based on various materials<sup>22</sup>

We have introduced some study findings on the factors that lead to loneliness and social isolation and resulting health risks that may occur. While this issue is recognised to be tackled by society as a whole due to its significant risks and social losses, there is also a tendency to call for self-help in certain aspects because 'loneliness' is, after all, subjective.

Some artists and researchers consider loneliness to be 'an essential source of motivation for their creation and research', and even if they are struck by the intense agony of loneliness, they view their own state of loneliness in a positive light. In recent years, perhaps

based on the same recognition, many books have been written on 'how to deal with loneliness' from various perspectives, including medicine, philosophy and psychology, as well as brain science, biology, literature and other arts.

On the other hand, it has been discussed around the world that the support of those around you and changes in community and social structures are essential to relieve social isolation. As a result, a variety of efforts by public and private body-related businesses have recently been made.

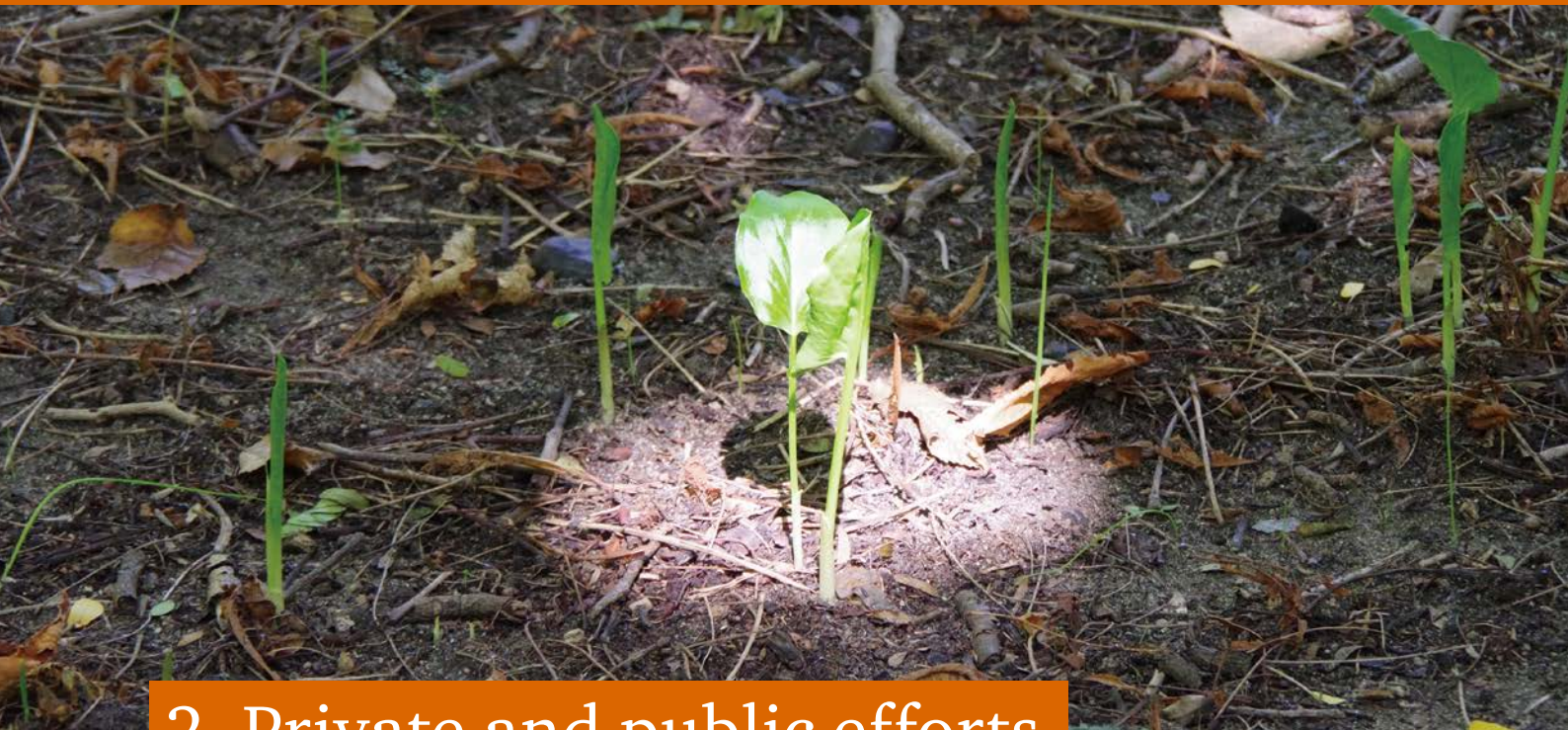
22 Sam Fardghassemi and more, 'The causes of loneliness: the perspective of young adults in London's most deprived areas' (viewed 7 July 2023). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8985970/>

Verywell Mind, 'Loneliness: Causes and Health Consequences' (viewed 25 August 2023). <https://www.verywellmind.com/loneliness-causes-effects-and-treatments-2795749>

Fukuoka City Social Welfare Council, 'Loneliness and Isolation' (viewed 29 August 2023). <https://fukuoka-shakyo.or.jp/koritsu.html>

23 A search of the National Diet Library database for the keyword 'loneliness' in its collection yields 819 hits for books stored since 2013. Of these, there are approximately 192 books on the phenomenon of loneliness and how to deal with it, including duplicates such as revised editions and large print editions (as of 17 August 2023). Note that we have used the term 'approximately' here because we believe that there are differences in judgement regarding books that do not focus on loneliness as their main topic, but partially mention loneliness in the text.





## 2. Private and public efforts

### Japan

In February 2021, the Japanese government established the post of ‘Minister of Loneliness and Isolation’, the second in the world after the UK, as well as the ‘Office for Policy on Loneliness and Isolation’ in the Cabinet Secretariat under the command of the Minister.

The following month, in March, the government decided to provide approximately six billion yen in emergency support to NPOs etc. that are working on measures to combat loneliness and isolation, including ‘life support and suicide prevention measures’. It also began holding regular meetings of the ‘Council for Promotion of Measures against Loneliness and Isolation (formerly the Liaison Council on Measures against Loneliness and Isolation)’, consisting of vice ministers from all government ministries and agencies. The Council has established three task forces, consisting of (1) the use of social media, (2) the identification of actual conditions and (3) support for collaboration among bodies involved in loneliness and isolation. They are currently considering and promoting comprehensive and effective measures against loneliness and isolation throughout the government.<sup>24</sup>

In promoting measures against loneliness and isolation, the government has established four main pillars (Figure 5), based on the following basic principles: (1) address

loneliness and isolation throughout society, (2) promote measures from the perspective of the individuals and their families and (3) promote measures that enable people to feel ‘connected’ to each other.

Furthermore, in February 2022, the Office for Policy on Loneliness and Isolation established the ‘Public-Private Collaboration Platform for Tackling Loneliness and Isolation’. This platform is a project to promote public-private collaboration with the aim of ‘supporting the efforts of members<sup>25</sup> by implementing activities to strengthen multilateral and broad-based collaboration, nationwide dissemination activities related to measures against loneliness and isolation, information-sharing on leading initiatives and academic research, and mutual awareness-raising activities etc.’ It was announced that the number of members was 482 bodies<sup>26</sup> as of 1 September, 2023.

In addition, the Japanese government has implemented a project to promote a local version of the Public-Private Collaboration Platform for Tackling Loneliness and Isolation, the opening of a round-the-clock loneliness and isolation consultation telephone line as a centralised consultation support service (for a limited period), the implementation of a model survey, ‘You Are Not Alone – Let’s Seek Help, Let’s Provide Help in 2022’ and ‘Don’t Worry! You Are Not Alone in 2023’.

24 Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, ‘Priority Plan for Loneliness and Isolation Countermeasures’ (viewed 6 September 2023). <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/12000000/000885368.pdf>

25 Members here all agree with the objective of the platform, and include social welfare councils and other social welfare corporations, NPOs and other support organisations, as well as local governments that are highly interested in measures against loneliness and isolation. Cabinet Secretariat, ‘Public-Private Collaboration Platform for Tackling Loneliness and Isolation: Membership is now open’ (viewed 6 September 2023). [https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/kodoku\\_koritsu\\_platform\\_memberboshu/pdf/member\\_flyer.pdf](https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/kodoku_koritsu_platform_memberboshu/pdf/member_flyer.pdf)

26 Members include intermediary support bodies and national bodies in various fields (99 bodies), NPOs and other support bodies (194 bodies) and related government ministries and agencies (17 bodies). Cabinet Secretariat, ‘Public-Private Collaboration Platform for Tackling Loneliness and Isolation: List of Members’ (viewed 6 September 2023). [https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/kodoku\\_koritsu\\_platform/pdf/kaiin\\_ichiran.pdf](https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/kodoku_koritsu_platform/pdf/kaiin_ichiran.pdf)

## Local government

The local version of the Public-Private Collaboration Platform for Tackling Loneliness and Isolation promoted by the government is a project that will ‘establish a platform in order to promote collaboration among the public, private and NPO sector stakeholders in local

public bodies, support activities involved in loneliness and isolation countermeasures through collaboration and cooperation’. Through this project, the government is ‘implementing support, research and analyses from a meticulous perspective for the activities of subcontractors and local public bodies’.

**Figure 5: The four main policies of the Japanese government’s measures against loneliness and isolation**

<b>(1) Create a society where people who are lonely and isolated have fewer barriers to seek help</b>
1. Ascertain the state of loneliness and isolation
2. Create a portal site encompassing support information, provide timely information
3. Develop an environment in which it is easy to seek help
<b>(2) Provide seamless consultation and support depending on the situation</b>
1. Develop a consultation support system (promote round-the-clock telephone and SNS consultation etc.)
2. Support human resources fostering etc.
<b>(3) Promote the creation of a community where people can feel ‘connected’ to others by ensuring places to watch over and interact with each other and to live</b>
1. Secure places to be
2. Create an outreach-type support system
3. Promote preventive health-building of insurance policyholders through cooperation between insurers and local physicians
4. Promote comprehensive support systems in the regions
<b>(4) Provide detailed support for the activities of NPOs etc. working on tackling loneliness and isolation, and strengthen cooperation among the public, private and NPO sectors</b>
1. Provide meticulous support for the activities of NPOs etc. involved in loneliness and isolation countermeasures
2. Promote dialogue with NPOs etc.
3. Support the creation of a platform to serve as the bedrock for collaboration
4. Prepare a promotion system for governmental loneliness and isolation countermeasures

Source: Created by PwC based on the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare’s Priority Plan for Loneliness and Isolation Countermeasures

The platform promotion project was adopted in 2022 by 29 bodies (12 at prefectural or government ordinance-designated city level and 17 at local government level). As of 2023, nine bodies selected to serve in the first round of initiatives (four at prefectural or government ordinance-designated city level and nine at local government level) are working on initiatives to alleviate loneliness and social isolation in their regions.<sup>27</sup>

Two cities that elected to take part in the project for two consecutive years were Tottori City and Kitakyushu City. In conjunction with six adjacent towns, Tottori City, based on its ‘local cafeterias’ project already underway, plans to expand the member bodies of the Public-Private Collaboration Platform for Tackling Loneliness and Isolation. The city will also jointly implement training to foster ‘connection supporters’ and promote a food

<sup>27</sup> In the second round of initiatives, Hokkaido was selected at the prefectural or government ordinance-designated city level, and Noboribetsu City in Hokkaido at the local government level. Cabinet Secretariat, ‘Project for Promotion of Public-Private Collaboration Platform for Tackling Loneliness and Isolation’ (viewed 6 September 2023). [https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/kodoku\\_koritsu\\_platform/local\\_platform/index.html](https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/kodoku_koritsu_platform/local_platform/index.html)

support project through comprehensive collaboration with the logistics industry.<sup>28</sup> On 2 February 2022, Kitakyushu City established and announced the convening outlines for the Kitakyushu City Loneliness and Isolation Countermeasures Coordination Council.<sup>29</sup> With the participation of 15 organisations in the city, including NPOs etc. working on all sorts of activities, the council has thus far met five times.<sup>30</sup> In December 2022, it also published a handbook covering various anxieties.

Some local governments are implementing their own individual initiatives regarding loneliness and isolation, separate from those of the platform project. Aichi Prefecture implemented 223 related projects across its various bureaus in 2021.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, Osaka Prefecture formulated its ‘Osaka Policy to Promote Loneliness and Isolation Countermeasures’ based on the direction indicated by the national government, and also held the Loneliness and Isolation Forum,<sup>32</sup> thereby promoting its loneliness and isolation countermeasures.

In addition, an increasing number of local governments are enacting related ordinances.<sup>33</sup> For example, there are three ordinances in Japan with the words ‘loneliness’ or ‘isolation’ in the name of the ordinance. There are also ordinances to promote activities to watch over and

support each other for elderly people, strengthen community ties, prevent loneliness and isolation for children and child-rearing households, prevent any kinds of loneliness or isolation and promote suicide prevention measures.

Other unique ordinances that have been enacted since 2022 include the ordinance for the support of senior citizens newly starting community activities or working in a community (Sano City, Tochigi Prefecture), an ordinance for the support of single persons (Yamato City, Kanagawa Prefecture) and an ordinance for the support of the reclusive (Saitama Prefecture and Yamato City, Kanagawa Prefecture).

### Private bodies

The emergency assistance measures for NPOs etc. involved in the policies on loneliness and isolation implemented by the government<sup>34</sup> have been established annually for targets in areas such as suicide prevention measures, assistance for those living in poverty, foodbanks, aid for places children can be safe in and consultation for women. Furthermore, in 2023, these were extended to bodies dedicated to loneliness and isolation (Figure 6).



28 Tottori City, ‘Promotion of the local version of the Public-Private Collaboration Platform for Tackling Loneliness and Isolation’ (viewed 6 September 2023).

<https://www.city.tottori.lg.jp/www/contents/1690433732300/simple/5.pdf>

29 Kitakyushu City, ‘Convening Outlines for Kitakyushu City Loneliness and Isolation Countermeasures Coordination Council’ (viewed 6 September 2023).

<https://www.city.kitakyushu.lg.jp/files/000892650.pdf>

30 Cabinet Secretariat, ‘Public-Private Collaboration Platform for Tackling Loneliness and Isolation: Decision of Bodies Engaged in the First Round of Initiatives’ (viewed 6 September 2023).

[https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/kodoku\\_koritsu\\_platform/local\\_platform/pdf/230613\\_kettei.pdf](https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/kodoku_koritsu_platform/local_platform/pdf/230613_kettei.pdf)

Kitakyushu City, ‘Kitakyushu City Loneliness and Isolation Measures Coordination Council’ (viewed 6 September 2023).

<https://www.city.kitakyushu.lg.jp/ho-huku/16500283.html>

31 Aichi Prefecture, ‘Past and Future Measures against Loneliness and Isolation’ (viewed 6 September 2023).

<https://www.pref.aichi.jp/uploaded/attachment/397743.pdf>

32 Osaka Prefecture, ‘Measures against Loneliness and Isolation’ (viewed 6 September 2023).

[https://www.pref.osaka.lg.jp/fukushisomu/kodoku\\_koritsu/](https://www.pref.osaka.lg.jp/fukushisomu/kodoku_koritsu/)

33 Research Institute for Local Government, ‘Ordinances to Prevent Loneliness and Isolation’ (viewed 6 September 2023).

[http://www.rilg.or.jp/htdocs/img/reiki/111\\_kodoku.htm](http://www.rilg.or.jp/htdocs/img/reiki/111_kodoku.htm)

34 The relevant agencies and ministries are the Cabinet Secretariat’s Office for Policy on Loneliness and Isolation; Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare; Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries; Cabinet Office and Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport and Tourism.



**Figure 6: Bodies eligible for emergency assistance measures for NPOs etc. involved in the policies on loneliness and social isolation**

Year of implementation	Budgets	Categories of eligible bodies
2021	Decided by the Cabinet Meeting on Emergency Measures <sup>35</sup>	Suicide prevention measures, assistance for those living in poverty, foodbanks, school meal/school cafeteria assistance, assistance to create places where children can be safe, consultation aid etc. for women, bodies supporting independence in both housing and employment
2022	2022 government budget (including supplementary budget and reserve funds)/supplementary funds from 2021 budget	Suicide prevention measures, assistance for those living in poverty, foodbanks, implementation of school cafeteria assistance, assistance to create places where children can be safe, consultation aid etc. for women, bodies supporting independence in both housing and employment
2023	2022 and 2023 government budget (including supplementary budgets)	Assistance for NPOs etc. involved in leading initiatives in loneliness and isolation problems, suicide prevention measures, assistance for those living in poverty, foodbanks, implementation of school cafeteria assistance, assistance to create places where children can be safe, consultation aid etc. for women, bodies supporting independence in both housing and employment

Source: Created by PwC based on various government documents<sup>36</sup>

Over 130 bodies pursuing initiatives relating to loneliness and social isolation are introduced on the Cabinet Secretariat's dedicated website. The approaches of all these bodies vary considerably. In addition to the work of providing intimate consultation about anxieties, they also cover assistance for independence and child cafeterias for those facing poverty, foodbank promotion, single parent assistance for the socially vulnerable, support for DV victims, protection of young people with nowhere to turn, support for social participation and employment among persons with disabilities and assistance for sexual minorities. There is a call for donations at the top of the website.<sup>37</sup>

## United Kingdom

The UK government, which first announced its cross-departmental strategy to work on loneliness policy in 2018, has declared that its public commitments in all areas stipulated in the original strategy are proceeding well as of the end of March 2023. The government also published continued activities based on the three main pillars established five years ago, namely 1) removing stigma by building the national conversation on loneliness so that people feel able to talk about loneliness and reach out for help; 2) driving a lasting shift so that relationships and loneliness are considered in policy-making and delivery by organisations across society, supporting and amplifying the impact of organisations that are connecting people and 3) playing its part in improving the evidence base on loneliness, making a compelling case for action

35 Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 'Dissemination of Support for NPOs and Other Bodies Involved in the Policies on Loneliness and Isolation' (viewed 6 September 2023).  
<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/11920000/000759700.pdf>

36 2021: Cabinet Secretariat, 'To NPOs and Other Bodies Involved in the Policies on Loneliness and Isolation (20 October 2021 Version)' (viewed 6 September 2023).

[https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/kodoku\\_koritsu\\_taisaku/pdf/kinkyu\\_sien.pdf](https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/kodoku_koritsu_taisaku/pdf/kinkyu_sien.pdf)

2022: Cabinet Secretariat, 'To NPOs and Other Bodies Involved in the Policies on Loneliness and Isolation (28 December 2022 Version)' (viewed 6 September 2023).

[https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/kodoku\\_koritsu\\_taisaku/pdf/1228\\_hosei\\_yosan.pdf](https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/kodoku_koritsu_taisaku/pdf/1228_hosei_yosan.pdf)

2023: Cabinet Secretariat, 'To NPOs and Other Bodies Involved in the Policies on Loneliness and Isolation (1 April 2023 Version)' (viewed 6 September 2023).

[https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/kodoku\\_koritsu\\_taisaku/pdf/050310\\_hosei\\_yosan.pdf](https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/kodoku_koritsu_taisaku/pdf/050310_hosei_yosan.pdf)

37 Cabinet Secretariat, 'Bodies Involved in the Policies on Loneliness and Isolation' (viewed 6 September 2023).

[https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/kodoku\\_koritsu\\_taisaku/kodoku\\_koritsu\\_dantai/index.html](https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/kodoku_koritsu_taisaku/kodoku_koritsu_dantai/index.html)

and ensuring everyone has the information they need to make informed decisions.<sup>38</sup>

The UK government provides various subsidies for the implementation of these policies. For example, over the winter of 2020, it procured funds of around 1.38 billion yen<sup>39</sup> for activities aimed at helping the members of society who were most likely to experience loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the following year, 2021, it provided nine organisations aiding the visually impaired, LGBTQ+ and others most liable to descend into loneliness due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic with subsidies ranging from approximately 3.14 million yen to 9.22 million yen.<sup>40</sup> Since entering 2023, it has also established a fund of 5.53 billion yen<sup>41</sup> for the promotion of loneliness initiatives and volunteer activities in deprived communities.

### Local government

In 2016, the UK's Local Government Association<sup>42</sup> published the *Combatting Loneliness handbook* in conjunction with the Campaign to End Loneliness and Age UK charities. The handbook contains support methods for elderly people struggling with loneliness based on the latest academic evidence, but its content is also beneficial for all age groups.<sup>43</sup>

### Private bodies

In the UK, where there is a progressive clarification of loneliness and social isolation as social problems, the Campaign to End Loneliness<sup>44</sup> has been continuously active since 2011. The main content of its activities is the direct support of people suffering from loneliness and the collection of academic evidence regarding loneliness (risks and impacts on health, methods for measuring

loneliness, costs related to loneliness etc.). These activities are supported by the EU Interregional Fund, trusts, companies and public donations.

### United States

On 18 July, 2023, the US Senate member Chris Murphy introduced the 'National Strategy for Social Connection Act', in which a national strategy to combat loneliness and social isolation is drawn up.<sup>45</sup>

This national strategy act incorporates the establishment by the government of the Office of Social Connection Policy inside the White House, the development of effective strategies to improve social infrastructure in collaboration with federal government institutions, and the publication of national guidelines on social connections similar to existing national guidelines on sleep, nutrition and physical activity. Furthermore, there are plans to provide funding to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in order to gain a better understanding of loneliness and social isolation.



38 GOV.UK, 'Tackling Loneliness annual report March 2023: the fourth year' (viewed 6 June 2023). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/loneliness-annual-report-the-fourth-year/tackling-loneliness-annual-report-march-2023-the-fourth-year>

39 Equivalent to 7.5 million pounds. For the purposes of this report, the exchange rate used was 184.44 yen to the pound. GOV.UK, 'Government announces £7.5 million funding to tackle loneliness during winter' (viewed 7 September 2023). <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-announces-75-million-funding-to-tackle-loneliness-during-winter#:~:text=The%20Government%20has%20announced%20a,to%20those%20most%20at%20risk.>

40 Equivalent to 17,000 pounds to 50,000 pounds. GOV.UK, 'Loneliness Engagement Fund' (viewed 7 September 2023). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/loneliness-engagement-fund>

41 Equivalent to 30 million pounds. GOV.UK, 'Major fund to tackle loneliness and boost volunteering in disadvantaged areas launched' (viewed 7 September 2023). <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-fund-to-tackle-loneliness-and-boost-volunteering-in-disadvantaged-areas-launch>

42 The Local Government Association (LGA) is a nationwide organisation in the UK providing support, promotion and improvement on behalf of its member councils. Its core membership comprises 315 of the 317 councils in England. It includes district, county, metropolitan and unitary authorities along with London boroughs and the City of London Corporation. Local Government Association, 'Membership and services for councils and councillors' (viewed 7 September 2023). <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/membership-and-services-councils-and-councillors>

43 Local Government Association/Campaign to End Loneliness/Age UK 'Combating loneliness' (viewed 7 September 2023). [https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/combating-loneliness-guid-24e\\_march\\_2018.pdf](https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/combating-loneliness-guid-24e_march_2018.pdf)

44 Campaign to End Loneliness, 'About us' (viewed 7 September 2023).

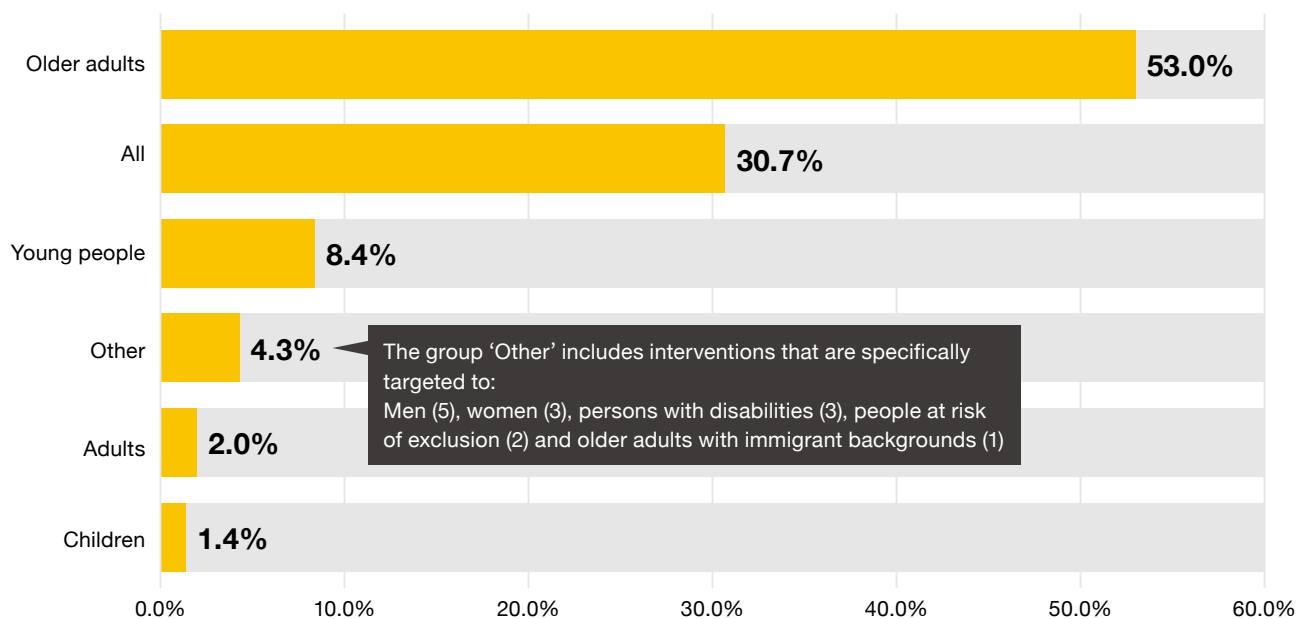
45 Chris Murphy, 'Murphy Introduces Legislation to Establish National Strategy to Combat Loneliness, Promote Social Connection' (viewed 8 September 2023). <https://www.murphy.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/murphy-introduces-legislation-to-establish-national-strategy-to-combat-lonelinesspromote-social-connection>

## European Union

With a widening awareness of the negative impact that loneliness can have upon people's health and happiness, several projects have been implemented with the aim of preventing and alleviating loneliness all across Europe. The European Union's Joint Research Centre (JRC) is compiling a database of the knowledge garnered mainly from current activities, and publishes it widely as a mapping site.<sup>46</sup>

The database does not cover every single one of the EU member nations. However, in addition to making it possible to look at county-specific data, it consists of meticulous classifications, such as target group (adults, children, women, men, older adults), type of intervention (befriending, community building, home visits, digital/technology solution) and type of organisation (national government, NGO, church/religious organisation and foundation), thus enabling the acquisition of the precise data sought for.

**Figure 7: Target groups in European loneliness countermeasure projects**



Source: Created by PwC based on European Commission reports

According to this database,<sup>47</sup> the highest ratio of organisations conducting loneliness-related activities is 2.7 organisations per million people in the Northern EU region, while the average is 0.63 in the Eastern, Western and Southern EU regions. In addition, the database is useful in enabling an understanding of the fact that

although there is an awareness that loneliness is a problem not only for older adults, but also young and middle-age people, the lion's share (53%) of those targeted for assistance is older adults. Responses aimed at younger people and children are an issue for the future (see Figure 7).



<sup>46</sup> European Commission, 'Mapping of loneliness interventions' (viewed 8 September 2023). [https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/scientific-activities-z/loneliness/mapping-loneliness-interventions\\_en](https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/scientific-activities-z/loneliness/mapping-loneliness-interventions_en)

<sup>47</sup> European Commission, 'Mapping of loneliness interventions in the EU' (viewed 8 September 2023). <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC134255>



# Conclusion

In this report, we have introduced how loneliness and social isolation, which tend to be thought of as being issues of the elderly, are in fact a more serious issue for younger rather than elderly generations according to the result of surveys in Japan and the US.

Loneliness and social isolation may seem to vary by age and region. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that factors such as (1) the weakening connections with others, such as family, as clarified by European surveys, as well as (2) physical stress and (3) social and economic elements are also contributing factors.

Furthermore, there is an increasing awareness that loneliness and social isolation are linked to mental health damage and can spark negative impacts, such as alcohol and drug addiction, abuse, violence and anti-social behaviour stemming from decreased memory, learning and judgemental capabilities.

Our understanding has improved regarding loneliness and social isolation through the surveys and research introduced in this Thought Leadership; our hitherto opaque understanding of this issue has become clearer. As a result, it is now feasible to execute countermeasures throughout society regarding the issue.

‘Loneliness and social isolation’, long-regarded as problematic social issues, have started to gain the attention of various national governments as a result of the vanguard initiatives of the UK government and the stagnation of social activity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, initiatives in terms of policy are still in their nascent state.

Since the Japanese government first appointed a Minister of Loneliness and Isolation in 2021, ministers have participated in meetings with the UK and EU, delivered keynote speeches at the OECD and in Spain, made a joint declaration with Germany and received courtesy visits from Australia and Israel.<sup>48</sup> Japan’s loneliness and social isolation policies are also drawing worldwide attention.

During 2023, there has been more action in the shape of initiatives treated as national issues by the governments of Germany<sup>49</sup> and the US. Furthermore, changes are arising in the awareness of people due to the involvement of governments in activities hitherto the remit of NGOs.

We have now entered the stage in which society is creating and sharing values beyond individualism. New value standards and sets of values will impact the structure of markets through the spread of grassroots non-profit activities. With the way that businesses operate, changing this trend will probably deepen and permeate through to each and every one of us who composes society.

Even if in historical terms this is merely a question of our going back to the past, for those of us who live in the present day these social changes—amounting to the acceptance of a new set of values we have never previously experienced—will also link in with new business chances as a major tidal change in our era.

In the next Thought Leadership, we will introduce some proposals for the mitigation of loneliness and social isolation and look at business cases that tie in with these risks.

48 Cabinet Secretariat, ‘International Collaboration to Tackle Loneliness and Isolation’ (viewed 8 September 2023). [https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/kodoku\\_koritsu\\_taisaku/kokusairenkei.html](https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/kodoku_koritsu_taisaku/kokusairenkei.html)

49 Die Bundesregierung, ‘GEM EINSAM - Strategie gegen Einsamkeit - Einsamkeit sitzt mit am Tisch’ (viewed 8 September 2023). <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/suche/hilfe-bei-einsamkeit-2156888>

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