

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth



Briefing 1: An Introduction to Research on the Impact of Covid-19 on the Youth Sector

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1. What is the aim of this briefing?

The EU- Council of Europe youth partnership runs the [Knowledge HUB: COVID-19 impact on the youth sector](#) with updates on research studies and analysis relevant for the youth sector. This briefing is created by the team of researchers within the framework of this project aiming to conduct meta-analysis of the existing body of research and results of surveys run across Europe, and provide a review of existing results and emerging gaps. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the world socially and economically, resulting in a global recession. The impact of the pandemic has been felt particularly strongly by young people. This briefing explores the initial findings of research on the impact of Covid-19 on the youth sector, with a focus on the areas which have been most impacted to date: education and mobility, youth employment, youth work and youth organisations and mental health and well-being.

2. The impact of Covid-19 on education and learning mobility

2.1 Key studies on education and learning mobility

Education is not only a fundamental human right. It is an enabling right with direct impact on the realization of all other human rights. Accordingly, [United Nations Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond](#), (UN, August 2020) warns that the pandemic has created severe disruption in the education systems and is threatening a loss of learning that may stretch beyond one generation of students. It calls for national authorities and the international community to come together to place education at the forefront of recovery agendas and protect investment in education. The OECD study [Shaping the Covid-19 Recovery Ideas from OECD's Generation Y and Z](#) (OECD 2020a), outlines innovative ideas and challenges as seen by the youth generation and captures their priorities for a better future. Another OECD survey [Schooling disrupted, schooling rethought: How the Covid-19 pandemic is changing education](#) (OECD 2020b), conducted in 59 countries, demonstrates remarkable resilience, flexibility and commitment to education in having established strategies for education continuity, in extremely challenging conditions, during the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, [UNESCO COVID-19 Education Response. Education Sector issue notes. Distance learning strategies in response to COVID-19 school closures](#), provides evidence of good practices, practical tips and links to important reference to mitigate the short-term and longer-term impact of school closures, including practical tips for designing policy and programmatic interventions to address and counter the social anxiety and build vital coping skills and emotional resilience among children, youth, their families and communities. Much of the current debate however focuses on quality of education and learning during school closures. European Commission's [Blended learning in school education: guidelines for the start of the academic year 2020/21](#), explore the pedagogical

opportunities and challenges of a blended learning model and identify key considerations that can help with reflection and strategic planning aiming to guide policy-makers in considering the system as a whole; complement existing guidelines by national authorities and international organisations.

[European Commission, Coronavirus - learning mobilities impact survey results](#) (May 2020) collect the views of over 11 000 mobility participants supported under the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes on how the Covid-19 outbreak affected the ordinary course of their mobility activities. European Commission and EACEA [Survey Report Erasmus Mundus Programme Implementation in the Context of COVID-19](#) (June 2020), furthermore presents the results of a survey carried out among Erasmus Mundus projects with the aim to investigate how consortia and students are coping with the unprecedented situation of the Covid-19 pandemic and to provide useful insights and feedback to Higher Education Institutions, the European Commission and EACEA, decision makers and other Erasmus+ stakeholders. Regional and national overview of the disruption caused by Covid-19 on higher education around the world and on the first measures undertaken by HEIs to minimize this disruption and to continue fulfilling their missions of educating the next generations, of advancing science and knowledge through research, and of providing service to local communities and society at large, is presented in the report [Regional/National Perspectives on the Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education](#), issued by International Association of Universities (IAU).

Insight into the impact of Covid-19 on mobility experience of over 20 000 international students and trainees across Europe is presented in the research report [Student exchanges in times of Crisis. The impact of COVID-19 on student exchanges in Europe](#), published by of The European Students Network (ESN April 2020). It also aims to support policy-makers to make evidence-based decisions and alter communication in order to answer the major challenges students face during their exchange in foreign countries, allowing the Erasmus Student Network to do data-driven student representation.

2.2. Highlights from studies on education and learning mobility

- More than 107 000 participants (75%) in Erasmus+ mobility were affected by the Covid-19 situation. More than 80 000 of these participants came back home while 27 000 stayed abroad. Close to 42% continued their activities with different arrangements (i.e. distance or online learning). For 22% participants the activity was temporarily suspended while for 36% of respondents the activity was definitely cancelled. (European Commission, May 2020).
- The Covid-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems in history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries and all continents. Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted 94 per cent of the world's student population, up to 99 per cent in low and lower-middle income countries. The crisis is exacerbating pre-existing education disparities by reducing the opportunities for many of the most vulnerable children, youth, and adults – those living in poor or rural areas, girls, refugees, persons with disabilities and forcibly displaced persons – to continue their learning (UN 2020).
- Preventing a learning crisis from becoming a generational catastrophe requires urgent action from all. In order to mitigate the potentially devastating consequences of the

Covid-19 pandemic, governments and stakeholders are encouraged to pursue the following policy responses: Suppress Transmission of The Virus and Plan Thoroughly for School Re-Openings; Protect Education Financing and Coordinate for Impact; Build Resilient Education Systems for Equitable and Sustainable Development; and Reimagine Education and Accelerate Change in Teaching and Learning (UN 2020).

2.3. Main gaps from studies on education and learning mobility

- Short-term and long-term impact of Covid-19 on education needs to be explored from broad perspective, including: school leadership; legislation to support decision-making; the management of in-school and distance learning environments for all learners; the teacher's role, competences, and working conditions; learner assessment; the well-being of staff and pupils; collaboration and school community; and quality assurance.
- More attention has been given to ensuring the continuity of academic learning than to the socio-emotional development of students (OECD 2020b). Social and emotional skills are well established, evidence-based practices, that can be adapted to help equip children, young people, parents and teachers with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours they need to cope with daily challenges (UNESCO Education issue notes 2020), and therefore the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on socio-emotional development of students needs to be further examined.

3. The impact of Covid-19 on youth employment

3.1 Key studies on youth employment

In a first search, we will find that today the main reports on employment and professional development in the field of youth are covered by organizations such as Eurofound, ILO, United Nations and the youth institutions of each country. Through their own questionnaires or based on official statistics, these studies focus on knowing the impact of the pandemic, and the confinement measures, on the youth labor market. Without a doubt, the ones that stand out the most today are: [Living, working and COVID-19](#) (Eurofound, 2020), [Global report: Youth & Covid-19: Impacts on Jobs, Education, Rights and Mental Wellbeing](#) (ILO, 2020), [Youth at Risk: Analysis of the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 on Spain's young population](#) (INJUVE, 2020) and [The United Nations Youth Flash Special issue on COVID-19 and Youth](#) (UN, 2020).

3.2 Highlights from studies on youth employment

- Covid-19 has pushed youth (ages 18-29) out of the labour market. According to the ILO (2020), 1 in 6 young people have had to stop working due to the pandemic. This has meant that youth unemployment rates have increased and, in turn, increased demand for employment among youth.
- On the other hand, the youth who are still employed report a considerable increase in their working hours. Which means job burnout and difficulty in disconnecting from work during the pandemic (ILO, 2020).
- In line with the findings, Eurofund (2020) identifies significant impacts among the youth who are employed.

- Only 60% of youth employees, ages 18 to 34, felt they were doing a useful job. This figure contrasts with the EU average, which stands at 70% or even with people over 50 years of age, who reach 80%.
- The previous data is inverted when asking about the labor demand they are having. Youth is at 33%, while the EU average is at 30% and for people over 50, at 23%.
- As a last indicator, it is observed that 37% of youth felt exhausted at the end of their working day. While the EU average is 32% and in people over 50 years, 27%.

At first instance, the main messages are the following:

- Government responses have been more focused on reaching those young people who still have a job, rather than those who have lost it.
- The youngest youth (18-24) were more likely to stop working compared to adult youth (25-29) or the rest of the workforce (30+).
- Governments are urged to ensure unemployment insurance benefits cover all young people who have lost their jobs in order to avoid even greater losses in income and male access to benefits easier for those actively looking for a job.

3.3 Main gaps from studies on youth employment

- Due to the immediacy of responding to the pandemic consequences, studies have not yet focused on how this whole situation will affect the professional careers of Youth in the medium and long term.

4. The impact of Covid-19 on youth work and youth organisations

4.1 Key studies on youth work and youth organisations

Another cluster of studies comes from surveys of youth work organisations to explore their adaptations to social distancing measures and short, medium, and long-term goals in the wake of the pandemic. Many of the studies on this topic are on the national or local level, with some key European level studies and surveys such as the [Effects of Covid-19 cross youth work and youth activities](#) launched by the CJM, the EKCYP survey [Towards a better understanding of the impact of Covid-19 on the youth sector](#), the [Survey on the impact of the corona pandemic on youth work in Europe - in the European Youth Programmes and beyond](#) by RAY Network, and the [Initiatives during the COVID-19 outbreak by EYCA member organisations](#) by the European Youth Card Association. The [Blueprint to Recovery](#) by the European Youth Forum also provides a section on the work of youth organizations during the pandemic.

4.2 Highlights from studies on youth work and youth organisations

The impact on youth work and sector goes beyond severe economic effects. It raises concerns on the mental health of young people and on possible marginalisation of those that are “too often out of reach”, as well as youth work “dropouts”. The studies also suggest that it is crucial to guarantee adequate funding, to include the young people in the decision making and to develop innovative solutions to ensure these essential services continue to function fully.

- Survey results show us that only 7% of youth workers and leaders were little to not affected by the pandemic. Youth work was mainly affected in terms of workspaces (69%) and nearly 3 quarters of the organisations participating in the survey had to **close their facilities temporarily** (RAY 2020)
- The majority of organizations in the youth sector are facing **economic challenges** including cuts in their budgets, staff reduction, job insecurity, delays or cancellation of their programmes for the years 2020-21 and reported continuous challenges in existing or pending grant applications (RAY 2020; EKCYP 2020)
- Different studies underline the issue of **youth work dropouts**, in which youth workers lost access to the young people they normally work with. The drop in engagement level is particularly significant for youth from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, showing the importance of face-to-face youth work (RAY 2020).
- Youth workers reported large difficulties in transferring their work to online environments due to lack of **digital resources and digital skills**. Greater investment in digital technologies, training, and infrastructures is needed in order to engage young people digitally. The digital divide has affected young people themselves, increasingly isolating already marginalised youth with little or no access to online technologies (European Youth Forum 2020).
- The analyses raised important questions concerning the need to find a **new approach for youth work** and nonformal education in online spaces - including quality digital youth work, safe spaces to join youth work activities, but also blended solutions to motivate young people to return to face-to-face activities when possible (EKCYP 2020)
- Many youth organizations at the national and local level have adopted **different practices to respond to the current situation**: online exhibitions, online daily sports challenges, webinars on how to enrich free time at home and how to keep a healthy lifestyle, social media campaigns, keeping young volunteering active by cooperating with local authorities on the delivery of pharmaceuticals, masks, and food to those in need (EYCA 2020).

4.3 Main gaps from studies on youth work and youth organisations

- Which would be the medium to long-term strategies and integrated approaches adopted by organizations in the youth sector, notably synergies between local, national, and European levels.
- Different studies have already underlined a crucial issue in the aftermath of the pandemic, namely the exacerbation of existing inequalities, including among groups of already marginalised young people. Research is needed in order to understand first, which inequalities studies are referring to exactly: which groups of young people have been hit the most and why, how the youth sector can work towards addressing these? Second, is it only the case that existing inequalities have been exacerbated or are we witnessing new and different inequalities emerging among young people?

5. The impact of Covid-19 on young people’s mental health and well-being

5.1 Key studies on mental health and well-being

The impact of Covid-19 on young people's mental health and well-being has been explored in many research studies. Two of the most notable are the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) [How's Life? 2020: Measuring Well-being](#) and [Youth and COVID-19: Response, Recovery and Resilience \(2020\)](#).

Research networks such as the Emerging Minds Network are gathering data on mental health challenges and support needs by young people in countries such as the UK, Ireland, Iran, Denmark and the US as part of its [Co-SPACE Study](#).

Nationally, many governments, state agencies and youth agencies are conducting research which explores the impact of Covid-19 on young people's mental health and well-being. For example, in Ireland the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2020) conducted a national consultation with young people on mental health and well-being called [How's Your Head? Young Voices During Covid-19](#).

5.2 Highlights from studies on mental health and well-being

- The OECD (2020) identified significant psychological impact of social distancing and quarantine measures on young people causing stress, anxiety and loneliness.
- OECD (2020) research also found that young adults (aged 18 to 29) have experienced higher levels of distress compared to other age groups since the onset of the pandemic.
- The need to invest in mental health support for young people was identified as one of the most significant short-to-medium term policy challenges facing the youth sector as a result of the pandemic ([Youth Partnership, 2020](#)).
- School closures have affected young people's mental well-being as teachers and classmates can provide social and emotional support (OECD, 2020).
- The Covid-19 pandemic poses a threat to young people's mental health, by worsening existing problems and curtailing access to school-based mental health services ([JAMA Pediatrics, 2020](#)).
- Covid-19 is negatively impacting on women and girls' mental health and well-being in an unequal manner ([University of Essex, 2020](#)).
- Covid-19 is having a serious impact on mental health of LGBTI+ young people ([BeLonG To Youth Services, 2020](#)).
- As well as negative impacts of mental health, some young people are experiencing positive mental health impacts (Department of Children and Youth Affairs (Ireland), 2020).

5.3 Main gaps from studies on mental health and well-being

- What are the long-term impacts and consequences of Covid-19 on young people's mental health and well-being.
- Why are women and girls, LGBTI+ young people and other vulnerable groups disproportionately affected by Covid-19 in relation to mental health and well-being.

6. Conclusion

A significant body of studies, analyses, surveys and policy documents already exists on the impact of Covid-19 on young people and the youth sector from multiple perspectives. A first review of the literature shows that education, learning, mobility, unemployment, and mental health are the most researched topics so far. Looking across these studies, key messages emerge on the types of impact and extent to which different sections of the youth population are affected. Yet, more research is needed in order to better qualify the nature and content of the impact, beyond descriptive observations:

- Why have some groups of young people been affected more than others?
- How different types of impacts are interlinked to each other?
- Are new inequalities emerging, beyond the exacerbation of existing ones?

As for policies in general, including the youth sector's future work, research and data should be collected with the aim of looking at long-term impacts - and not only short and medium-term - of the pandemic. Synergies and cooperation between different levels - local, national, European - should be highlighted in future research, along with best practices aligned with the research quality standards.