

# Youth Partnership

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



EUROPEAN UNION

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## **Towards a better understanding of the impact of Covid-19 on the youth sector**

**Report**

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*Disclaimer: The content of this document, commissioned by the EU CoE youth partnership, is on the entire responsibility of the author and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of either of the partner institutions (the European Union and the Council of Europe).*

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## Introduction

The Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth undertook a research project "Towards a better understanding of COVID-19 impact on the youth sector", which involved, inter alia:

"Conducting a questionnaire for data gathering from the networks of European Knowledge Centre on Youth Policy (EKCYP) and the Pool of European Youth Researchers (PEYR) correspondents with a view to compiling and assessing data on the impact of COVID-19 on the youth sector - and in particular its impact on initiatives related to youth policy, youth work and supports for youth organisations - at national, regional and local level and sharing the resulting data, assessment and findings".

Given the uncertainties with regard to the pandemic, EKCYP and PEYR correspondents were asked, in light of their experience and expertise in the youth field in their respective countries, to give an informed and considered view, in responding to the questionnaire, on how COVID-19 and the lockdown had impacted on and been responded to by the youth sector over the six month period, March to August 2020. The aim was to get a snapshot in time of how young people in different countries across Europe had been impacted by COVID-19 and the lockdown and how the youth sector had responded in reaching out to, communicating with and informing young people and developing new and innovative approaches, particularly through youth inclusion and participation, digitalization and youth work practice to support them in time of crisis.

### Structure of the questionnaire

The questionnaire, which was posted using Google Forms and issued to all EKCYP and PEYR correspondents on 4 September 2020, was categorised under the following headings:

- Nature and duration of the lockdown and communication with young people on staying safe.

- Funding for the youth sector.
- State operated programmes, youth work services and other supports for young people.
- NGO sector programmes, youth work services and other supports for young people.
- Young people - impact on and response of young people to the lockdown.
- Policy - implications for future youth policy resulting from the lockdown.

Some questions required a tick-box response while others required a more open-ended response. The tick-box responses were not meant to be definitive or judgmental, but rather to reflect the considered and informed view of correspondents in light of the pandemic. In giving reasons or examples for tick-box responses, correspondents were requested to give, where possible, examples of practical and innovative approaches in identifying and meeting the needs of young people during the lockdown. Links to relevant material and further information, in whatever language, were also requested to be included where possible.

By the end of November 2020, there were 37 responses to the questionnaire from 28 countries - Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden, Ukraine and the United Kingdom.

The term “country” (European Cultural Convention) rather than “member state” is used in the report.

All information and data included in the data analysis and graphs derive solely from the responses to the questionnaire, except where other information or data are employed for illustrative or comparative purposes.

## The lockdown and measures and advice communicated to young people on staying safe.

The lockdown commenced in mid-March across Europe and lasted for on average some two months, with countries coming out of lockdown from mid-May to early-June. In a number of countries, Armenia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Germany, Portugal and Serbia, local or intermittent lockdowns continued for longer and a phased emergence from lockdown over the summer months and early autumn characterised most countries.

The lockdown for the most part was at national level and general across Europe (Figures 1 and 2). While there were some partial lockdowns in Germany, Norway and Malta; Sweden and Belarus appear to be the only countries that did not have a general or national lockdown, thought measures were adopted to counter the impact of the pandemic.

Communication during the lockdown was targeted at the population in general rather than at specific categories, such as young people. There was also some evidence as to poor communication and mixed messaging as regards responses to the pandemic. A number of countries did however specifically communicate directly with young people, whether through television, social media, state organisations for young people and NGOs.

In Austria, ORF (the national broadcasting corporation), initiated a morning programme for children and youth people, providing information and advice and supporting home schooling. The Irish national broadcasting corporation, RTE, through its Homeschool Hub provided a home-school programme that discussed lockdown measures and provided advice.

In a number of countries, relevant ministries took the initiative in communicating directly with youth people. In Bulgaria, the Minister of Youth and Sports issued an appeal to young people and the representatives of youth organisations to take an active part in local and national initiatives to support government efforts in addressing the pandemic.

In Croatia, the Ministry for Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy organised a meeting with the National Youth Council to address youth related issues during the lockdown. The Ministry of Education, Children and Youth in Luxembourg ran a specific webpage “well-being @home”, with relevant information and advice on the pandemic. In Norway, the Prime Minister held a press conference for children and young people in March 2020, and the Minister for Health in Ireland held some video questions and answers sessions with children and young people. Ministries for youth also initiated working groups to coordinate responses to the pandemic. In Norway, the Ministry of Children and Families appointed a national coordination group to assess the services offered to children and young people during the lockdown.

National bodies and agencies also employed portals and platforms to communicate with and advise young people. In Estonia, the national youth information portal, "Teeviit" (Signpost), provided young people with relevant information and advice in both Estonian and Russian; both Estonia and Belarus also conducted nation-wide information campaigns. The National Youth Service (Service National de la Jeunesse; SNJ) in Luxembourg launched an awareness-raising campaign on Facebook and the Youth Information Centre (Agence Nationale pour l'Information des Jeunes; ANJI) offered an information sheet which contained youth-tailored information on COVID-19. Through its social media platform, Agenzija Zghazagh in Malta, provided information, advice and support to young people and the Institute of Health in Norway provided information and advice to children and young people. In Germany, a website for children and young people, "Explain corona 4 kids", was launched with a focus on strengthening children's and young people's mental health during the pandemic.

NGOs in the voluntary youth sector also undertook initiatives to inform and advise young people during the lockdown. In Austria, youth information centres provided detailed information campaigns online and in Bosnia Herzegovina some NGOs mounted information campaigns that emphasised the importance of social distancing. Stakeholders in the voluntary youth sector in Belgium also undertook initiatives to inform young people about lockdown measures. Youth organisations and their umbrella

organisations in Estonia provided information on safety measures, offered consultations on how to re-organise youth related activities, and advised on how to make the best use of free time during the lockdown. An online youth clinic, umo.se, in Sweden gave both health advice relating to the pandemic and information of other online services during the lockdown. In the United Kingdom, many youth organisations provided advice through social media to young people, while in Ukraine the main channels for communication with young people were Instagram and Facebook. The municipalities in Finland, as well as in Norway and Sweden, also played a leading role in providing information and advice to young people on the pandemic.

The impact of the lockdown and its severity is reflected in a survey of voluntary associations (including youth) in France, which concluded that some 70% were unable to maintain more than 20% of their activities, almost 60% had to rethink how they operated and moved to digitalization and over 85% were forced to cancel one or more events.

*Figure 1*

Please indicate whether the lockdown was:  
35 responses

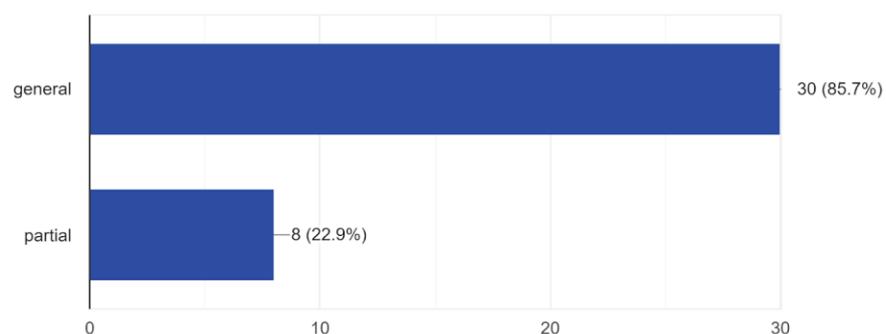
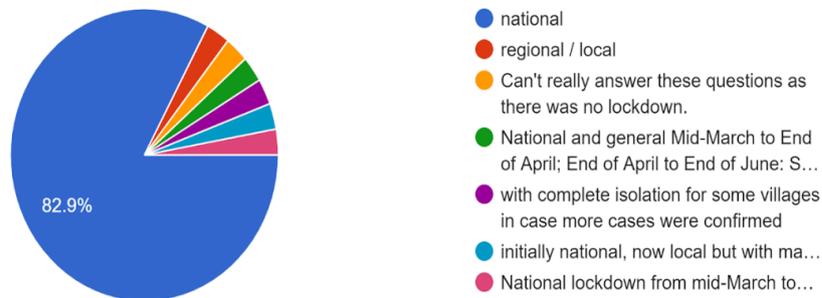


Figure 2

Please indicate whether the lockdown was:  
35 responses

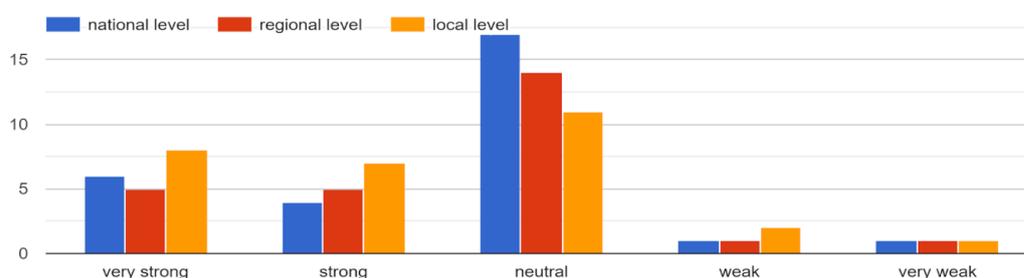


## Impact of COVID-19, the lockdown and other measures on public funding for the youth sector, including the voluntary youth sector.

For most countries the impact on public funding was either neutral, strong or very strong (Figure 3). Only a small minority of countries described the impact as weak or very weak. In general, state funding for the youth sector appears to have remained relatively consistent during the lockdown.

Figure 3

What has been the impact of COVID-19, the lockdown and other measures on public funding in your country for the youth sector, including the voluntary youth sector, at:



There appears to have been no decrease in public funding in Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta, and Romania; while the annual open calls for grant schemes that support young people and children in the Czech Republic were not affected. In Estonia, local governments continued to fund and maintain municipal youth work during the lockdown. The Ministry of Youth and Sports in Bulgaria provides funding to youth NGOs through two national programmes and these continued to be supported throughout the lockdown. In Finland, central government subsidized the financial losses of municipalities and NGOs. The Finnish state budget for youth work is funded through the national lottery and since the gaming industry suffered significant losses during the lockdown, money for youth work diminished accordingly.

However, cuts in funding or the redirection of funding as a result of the pandemic were in evidence in a number of countries.

In some cases in Austria, the municipality did not release project funds, since projects ceased during the lockdown. Some of the municipalities in Finland also cut resources for youth work. Municipalities in Norway were also affected financially by the pandemic due to loss of revenues and the expenses incurred by testing and tracing that may have impacted on funding for non-statutory services such as youth clubs. Some local funding in the United Kingdom was tied to opening times of local youth centres and consequently was not available during lockdown. In Croatia, many municipalities cut funding for youth NGOs. Most youth work in Croatia is organised by youth NGOs on a project basis and

funding cuts further exacerbate the difficulties they face as they do not have regular or secure funding supports.

There is also evidence of funding for the youth sector being transferred to other priority areas or delayed cancelled or postponed - including European and internationally funded projects - in some countries, such as Bosnia Herzegovina, Cyprus, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine. Countries where funding for the youth sector is largely focused on project-based activities carried out by youth NGOs and largely dependent on European, international, or intermittent state funding, appear to have been adversely affected by the lockdown. In North Macedonia, the agency of youth and sports initiated the process of establishing youth centres, primarily for youth work, in four cities. However, while locations were identified, the process was stopped as a result of the pandemic, and the funds for the youth centres were reallocated to youth NGOs.

Some countries, however, were more proactive and innovative in responding to the challenges posed by the lockdown and provided additional funding and supports.

The Youth Board of Cyprus initiated a new complementary funding scheme, entitled “ReCOVer2020”, and in Serbia the Ministry for Youth and Sports took the decision to support 88 projects that include more than 100,000 young people in different types of activities at local and national level. When NGOs and private providers in Estonia were not able to provide youth service or parents were not able to continue their contributions as a result of the impact of the pandemic, in most cases local governments allocated additional funding. In North Macedonia, the agency for youth and sport supported 25 local youth NGOs with some €3,000 each to help ensure some programme and financial sustainability.

While there was no national or general lockdown in Sweden, the government set aside SEK 100 million in 2020 for civil society organisations' work with children and young people. The Swedish government has introduced support programmes for municipalities, to compensate for the extra costs resulting from the impact of the pandemic. In Germany,

an additional €100 million is being allocated to child and youth education institutions, childcare and youth work services to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. To ensure the liquidity of non-profit organisations, the federal government has also launched a special loan programme amounting to one billion euros.

## Impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown on the employment and conditions of professional/paid youth workers.

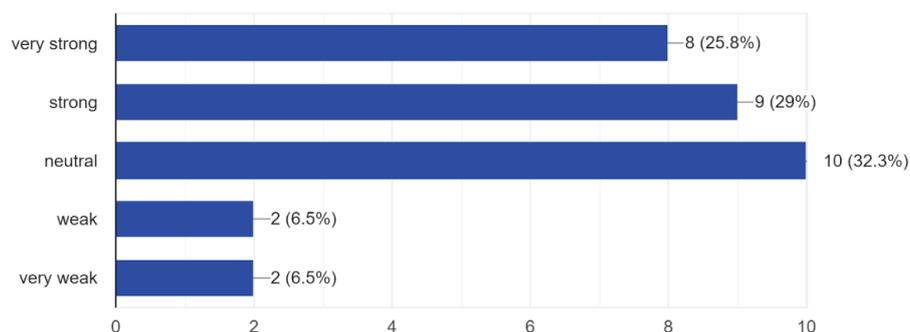
Over 85% of countries ranked the impact on youth workers as very strong, strong or neutral (Figure 4).

In many countries, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Luxembourg and Slovenia, youth workers, to varying degrees, experienced reduced working hours, changes in working conditions, adoption of new practices - digitalization - and in some instances, job insecurity. There is also some evidence of variation at nation, regional and local level as regards pay and conditions.

*Figure 4*

What has been the impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown on the employment and conditions of professional/paid youth workers?

31 responses



In some municipalities in Austria, youth workers were either dismissed or had to accept reduced working hours during the lockdown, while in Finland, varying local responses at municipal level meant that some youth workers had a difficult time. While short-term, furlough payments were provided to youth workers in the United Kingdom, many

potentially face redundancy. Open youth work in Germany has been characterised for many years by precarious employment, a shortage of skilled workers and poor remuneration, all of which were further exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic.

Because of social distancing during the lockdown, youth workers had to work online, usually from their homes and using the resources available, in often difficult and stressful circumstances: voluntary or part-time youth workers were particularly affected in this respect. In some instances, as in Estonia and the Czech Republic, youth workers had no experience with providing youth work on-line or did not have adequate IT resources or supports. Youth workers in NGOs in North Macedonia, Poland, Serbia and Ukraine, who often work on a contract basis and are reliant on European or private funding were also adversely affected by the impact of the pandemic.

There were countries however, such as Bulgaria, Estonia, Luxembourg and Malta, where the impact of the pandemic on youth workers and their employment and conditions appear to have been little affected by the lockdown.

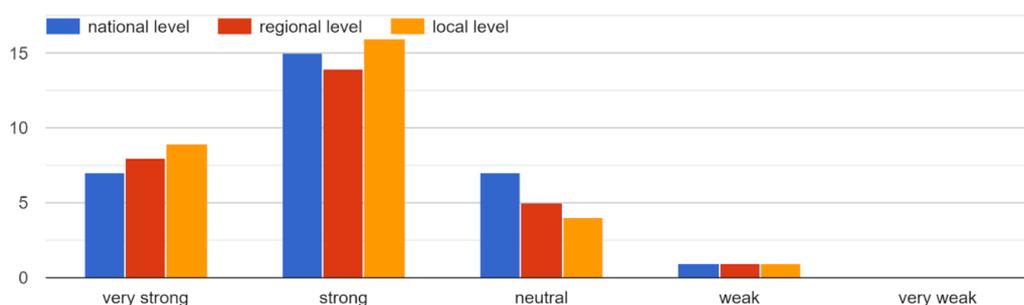
The impact of the pandemic on the employment and working conditions of youth workers appears to highlight, and in some instances exacerbate, existing problems and issues. In countries where the youth sector is well funded and supported by the state and where youth workers have stable employment and working conditions, the impact of the pandemic was less severe, and while there were challenges and difficulties it did not pose an existential threat. In countries however, where the youth sector and youth work is largely dependent on voluntary youth NGOs and European or private funding and where youth workers are generally volunteers or in part-time or contract employment, the impact of the pandemic was more severe. What may be of particular concern is that recent policy developments and efforts at European level to promote the youth work agenda may be impeded, or derailed, by the need for social distancing for the foreseeable future.

## Impact of COVID-19, the lockdown and other measures on state operated programmes, youth work services and other supports for young people.

The majority of countries saw the impact as either strong or very strong, with fewer countries seeing the impact as either neutral or weak (Figure 5).

*Figure 5*

What has been the impact of COVID-19, the lockdown and other measures on state operated programmes, youth work services and other supports for young people at



The requirements of social distancing during the lockdown severely impacted on youth sector programmes and activities and also reflected the importance of the physical environment and face-to-face contact in the sector. While online and digitalized approaches were adopted, there was a lack of capacity, resources and training in some countries as well as an urban/rural divide in some instances. Young people at risk also appear to have been more severely impacted. There was some evidence of programmes and activities as well as new policy measures being delayed or postponed.

The lockdown and the need for social distancing effectively meant that programmes and services had to go online and this posed many challenges. In Austria, moving all youth work services online proved problematic and depended on the capacity of youth centres and youth workers at local level to reach out to young people, particularly those in need. Projects on state operated programmes in Bulgaria that were supposed to be implemented during the spring and summer months were postponed or rescheduled, but

many activities continued to be available online. In Croatia, where there are no regular online support structures for young people, most available services were put on-hold and there appears to have been no organised effort to provide youth services digitally. In some countries, such as the Czech Republic, formal education was prioritised over youth or leisure-time activities in terms of online supports; while in others, such as Ireland, there appears to have been a broader level of cross-sectoral support.

A number of countries including Austria, Belgium and Ireland, also point to higher levels of anxiety, loneliness and domestic problems among young people and the ensuing difficulties of contacting and remaining in contact with them. Lack of digital skills, of funding for IT equipment, poor levels of training in IT, were also cited by a number of countries, including Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Moldova and Ukraine.

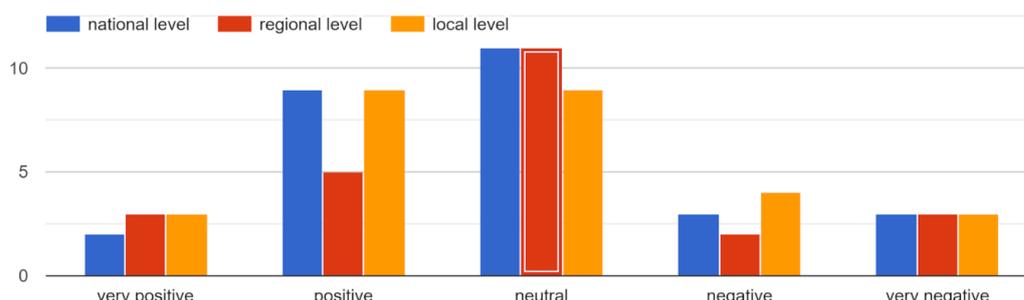
### Effectiveness of state operated programmes, youth work services and other supports for young people during the lockdown.

While responses from countries are fairly mixed, there is evidence that many state operated programmes were both proactive and innovative in their responses (Figure 6).

Working groups were convened and new initiatives adopted in some countries to counteract the impact of the pandemic, particularly for young people at risk. The Youth Board of Cyprus established a “Working Group for COVID-19”, comprising young people and representatives of youth NGOs and offered a series of workshops on digital skills. In the Czech Republic, the National Youth Work Associations, the National Youth Council and youth NGOs cooperated in sharing experience, supports and materials during the lockdown.

Figure 6

How effectively did state operated programmes, youth work services and other supports for young people, respond to the lockdown at



Youth services in a number of countries were put online, while there was also an increase in digitalized and outreach services. In Austria, information and counselling were offered through telephone and private chats. The Ministry of Education and Science in Bulgaria provided laptops and other digital supports free of charge for vulnerable young people, especially for those in remote areas and socially disadvantaged or minority groups. In Estonia, a number of initiatives were undertaken, including “Hack the Crisis: Youth”, which organised a COVID-19 thematic hackathon for young people aged 14 to 19, to empower them with ideas and solutions to tackle the pandemic and its potential impact. During lockdown many youth centres in Estonia reoriented their work into virtual youth centres through different online platforms (e.g. Discord, Roblox) to stay in touch with young people and offer new forms of engagement through e-sport and online challenges. Mobile youth work in Tallinn also went online and the Estonian Association of Youth Workers (EAYW) and Estonian Youth Work Centre (EYWC) provided online consultations and workshops for youth workers on mobile youth work practice.

At local level in Finland, there was a considerable increase in digital youth services, and in some cases outreach youth work. Youth services in Ireland worked to maintain supports, particularly for vulnerable young people, through the development of innovative working methods and the sector adapted quickly by providing alternative online and phone supports for young people.

Many young people in Bulgaria became volunteers and participated in non-medical activities in hospitals and healthcare establishments as well as in activities in support of the National Operational Headquarters, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Health.

In Malta, most programmes and project operated by Agenzija Zghazagh were moved online. The agency also initiated a series of online sessions for and with young people using various social media platforms. Two school transition programmes were also provided by the agency in response to the pandemic: "My Next School Adventure", that catered for young people who are in transition from Year 6 to Year 7 and "Secondary School Survival Kit", a programme for young people who are in transition from Year 9 to Year 10. Nearly 500 young people participated in both programmes.

In Serbia, NAPOR and its member organisations, were given permission to reschedule all activities and reallocate unspent budgets to create online support programmes. NAPOR also took a number of initiatives including: "Youth exchanges from home - anything is possible" which provided for online youth exchanges; "Youth work online – demonstrate and connect" which demonstrated eight digital methods/tools/platforms; and digital youth clubs and webinars for youth workers.

Local youth departments and voluntary youth organisations in Ukraine promoted joint initiatives and there was an increase in online youth services in the United Kingdom. The Ministry of Education in Moldova also started delivering online courses for teachers and youth workers on the use of IT tools and resources.

In Germany the "Forum Transfer: Innovative Child and Youth Aid in the Times of Corona" has developed into a platform for the exchange of good practice and the initiation and testing of new digitalized approaches to child and youth welfare and services.

In Portugal, #SERJOVEMEMCASA (Being young at home) was a campaign to encourage and promote online projects by and for young people, while "Apoio Maior" was a country-wide inter-generational project to support the elderly by delivering food and medicine and tackling social isolation.

## The impact of COVID-19, the lockdown and other measures on NGO sector programmes, and the effectiveness of the sector’s response.

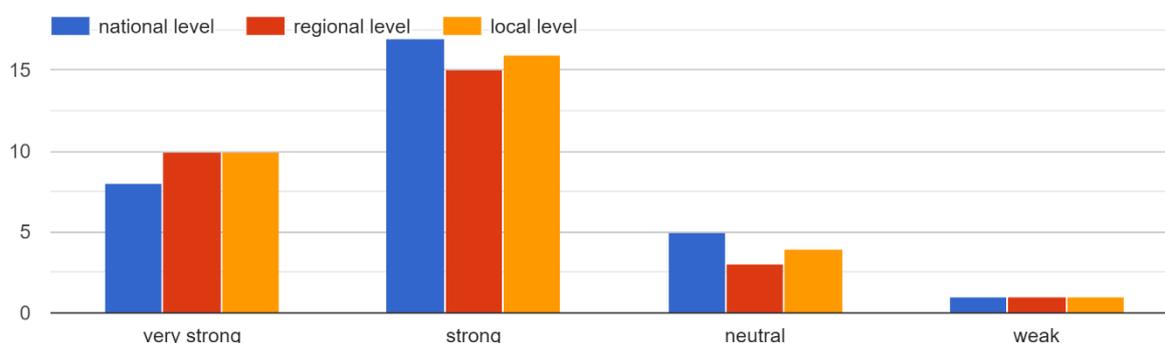
The impact on the NGO sector was strong in most countries (Figure 7). The activities of NGOs were in most countries suspended or restricted. It was reported that in these countries, the facilities were closed and face-to-face meetings were stopped, postponed or cancelled. In Belgium, the lockdown also impeded camps in the spring holidays, and after the lockdown summer camps were limited to 50 people.

After the lockdown was lifted, youth work NGOs had to continue to deal with many restrictions – only a limited number of people were allowed. For example in Moldova these restrictions were described as: “no more than 20 participants, or 50 but with 1 square meter around each participant - this made it difficult and super expensive to actually organise.” Many other countries referred to such restrictions.

In Cyprus, it was pointed out that incoming volunteers had to return to their home countries so the action plans of the organizations, which depended on them, was changed or completely stopped.

Figure 7

What has been the impact of COVID-19, the lockdown and other measures on NGO sector programmes, youth work services and other supports for young people at



A general trend was – as with state run activities – to promote online alternatives. However, problems were manifold; in particular, the technical equipment for online activities was not available for all who needed it. Bulgaria reported that participants in youth work were not well equipped with computers, so the Ministry of Education and Science provided laptops for the most vulnerable groups.

Some countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Germany, North Macedonia) did not highlight difficulties in the transfer to online activities, which does not imply that the transfer operated everywhere without challenges.

In Estonia a model of good practice was the Estonian Scout Association, which introduced an innovative smart hiking format for their annual spring hike (<https://skaut.ee/uritused/e-juripaev/>), which resulted in more than 500 participants taking part both in individual hiking as well as in enjoying a virtual campfire evening on YouTube. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vu0MIDNN9M0&feature=youtu.be>)

In Austria, regional youth work organizations reported higher numbers of volunteers participating in online meetings than in traditional face-to-face settings; it seemed easier to log in from home than to go to a meeting somewhere, so some organisations are considering retaining this approach in future.

Training was also offered online, in Romania and in Serbia, where the national association of youth workers, NAPOR, offered special information and support for youth workers to work with Zoom.

Information on Covid-19, on hygiene and prevention as well as on the impact on young people was offered in some countries e.g. Belarus, Portugal, and Serbia.

One effect of the lockdown, as indicated by Belarus, Romania and Ukraine,, was that volunteering among young people became more visible. Many young people showed their readiness to support the elderly in everyday actions or in accessing digital media. Many volunteers could not support NGOs in the way they normally do, due to the restrictions on mobility.

In some countries, e.g. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Romania, and Ukraine, the NGOs had to face significant financial cuts because their funding was based on projects, which could not be carried out during the lockdown and not all NGOs managed

to keep their financial support. In Finland, the funding for NGOs continued and in Montenegro the public call for financing programmes was conducted. In other countries, it was pointed out that funding was continued for a certain time e.g. in Poland for at least 6 months, while in Norway the government introduced temporary compensation schemes for NGOs. Nevertheless, many NGOs are uncertain as to the sustainability of such funding in the future.

The impact of the lockdown and other measures on the NGO sector can be summarized in four main fields:

1. **Operative lockdown:** The lockdown led to the suspension of many activities. Only in some cases were youth centres kept open - with certain regulations: small groups, open air activities. Many youth NGOs could no longer reach the young people they are working with face-to-face. Cultural activities as well as physical activities were suspended. Projects had to be postponed or suspended. Summer camps were cancelled in many countries and in other cases these activities had to be reorganised. Registration of names for contact tracing was mentioned as a challenge.
2. **Finances:** In some countries, calls for funding of youth work projects were suspended, so future planning became more difficult. In countries where youth work is dependent on membership / tuition fees, the sustainability of youth work is in question if young people cannot participate in activities.
3. **Alternatives:** Many youth NGOs tried to move their activities online to reach their members (group evenings, member meetings). However, it became clear that in many cases there were neither enough digital resources nor digital skills available. In countries more familiar with digital / smart youth work the adjustment went more smoothly: both youth workers and young people were used to digitalization. Some umbrella organisations developed online support structures for NGOs and youth workers e.g. training courses on how to use digital tools.
4. **New activities:** Some youth NGOs started new online activities as alternatives to those that were no longer available due to the lockdown. Voluntary activities

increased and youth NGOs supported their members in helping others e.g. support for the elderly in the neighbourhood.

### Further examples of response in different countries

In Ireland, the Digital Youth Information Online Chat Service was launched by four partner organisations (Crosscare, SpunOut, YMCA and Youth Work Ireland). This online information service is directed at young people aged 16 to 25 who can ask questions to a trained youth information officer on live chat. (<https://fdys.ie/digital-youth-information-chat-service-now-available-through-fdys/>)

Also BelongTo and its network of local services, moved all their services to support LGBTI+ young people online and so provided one-to-one based youth work. (<https://www.belongto.org>)

In Armenia, a platform shows new opportunities for everyone who is interested in the remote jobs market (<https://kolba.am/>) and online training has been implemented by different NGOs.

The Belarusian Association of UNESCO Clubs, in the framework of the UNESCO initiative, shares the stories of young people around the world to draw attention to the problems of young people and highlight their key role in the fight and response to the pandemic - #MyHistoryCOVID-19 #Youth UNESCO.

In Portugal a set of activities, workshops, webinars and information were offered. Among these were workshops related to the arts, content creation, and ecological living. Furthermore, debates took place on issues that have an impact on young people, such as online safety, digital citizenship and youth rights.

In Croatia, the national umbrella association (Croatian Youth Network) has led some awareness raising activities in relation to the impact of the pandemic and youth access to rights and their well-being during the pandemic - especially in the areas of unemployment, education and access to rights and information.

During the COVID-19 crisis a large number of Maltese Scout Groups organised stay-at-home activities for their members. These activities were promoted on social media. One particular Scout group, who were supposed to be at their annual Group Easter Camp, created a Camp-at-Home programme where the participants were tasked with simulating life at camp each day.

In Estonia, approximately 20% of open youth centres are NGOs, many of which reoriented their work into virtual youth centres in different online platforms e.g. Discord, Roblox, (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/159153614742197/permalink/548907445766810/>) to stay in touch with young people by offering new formats of engagement via e-sport and online challenges.

In Poland, it was observed that local NGOs worked with young volunteers who helped elderly people with groceries or pet care during the lockdown.

In Serbia, a large number of youth work organisations coordinated their activities with local crisis headquarters. As a result, humanitarian aid was offered to elderly people as well as to young people from marginalized backgrounds e.g. Roma, homeless youth, youth in institutions. Youth NGOs also assisted the army in setting up spaces for the reception of patients with COVID-19.

"Center E8" in Serbia organised a podcast, #mladost, and online workshops on prevention of gender-based violence.

In Luxemburg, the scouts movement launched a webpage where they offered help for people who could not go out - shopping, walking the dog, delivering medication. (<https://www.fnel.lu/lu/news-page/2020/3/14/alldagengba>)

In Brussels, young people in two youth houses tried to raise awareness among young Belgians about lockdown rules and staying at home (<https://www.facebook.com/bakayarochannel/videos/1386026114936057/>). Normally young people could ask for help and exchanges through Accueil en Milieu Ouvert (AMO) Services. During the lockdown youth workers tried to keep in touch with the young people for whom this was necessary by means of online social networks. They also tried to ensure that young people had what they needed to follow their school classes, offering to print courses or exercises and ensuring that they were delivered.

In Germany, many organisations offered support to young people in coping with the challenges posed by the pandemic - for example, the webpage <https://www.corona-und-du.info/>, offered relevant information. Many actors in Children's and Youth Aid have been able to respond professionally to the challenges of the pandemic by trying to make their services digitally available.

The three main responses of the youth NGO sector can be summarised as follows::

1. **Move to online activities:** Since face-to-face meetings with young people were not possible during the lockdown, many NGOs offered online and telephone support and counselling for young people. This response had to be in accordance with the GDPR, which in cases of missing digital infrastructure can become challenging.

Beside these counselling offers, the programmes offered focused largely on educational and entertainment content. Among the offers were: digital youth information, online chats, virtual hiking experience, pub quizzes, online gaming, programming, virtual discussion groups, online wine tasting competition, and youth telephone support.

2. **Information:** Many NGOs started providing online information on issues relevant to young people during the pandemic: awareness raising on why to stay home, tips on how to stay healthy, understandable information on the Covid-19 situation in the country, easily accessible information on rules and regulations. In addition, legal information and counselling was offered to young people breaching Covid-19 regulations. A second important target group for information was youth workers and volunteers in the NGO sector. They were in particular need of information on the impact of measures, e.g. under what conditions and circumstances were they allowed to run activities.
3. **Health support activities:** NGOs started to provide health instructions for young people and show how to stay healthy. Furthermore, many NGOs started to offer online alternatives for physical activities (stay-at-home-activities) and mental health support.

## Impact on young people

The impact of the pandemic on the living conditions of young people in Europe was very strong. Even in countries where no complete lockdown was imposed, the pandemic had a negative impact on the situation of youth: In Sweden, mental health problems increased among young people generally and the labour market provided fewer employment opportunities. In almost all countries, the lockdown affected education and leisure time activities for young people and the economic consequences had a severe impact on their employment prospects.

Figure 8

What has been the impact of COVID-19, the lockdown and other measures on the inclusion, participation and well-being of young people and their access to rights and services?

34 Antworten

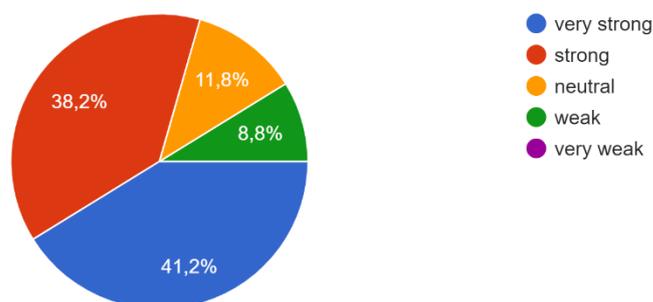
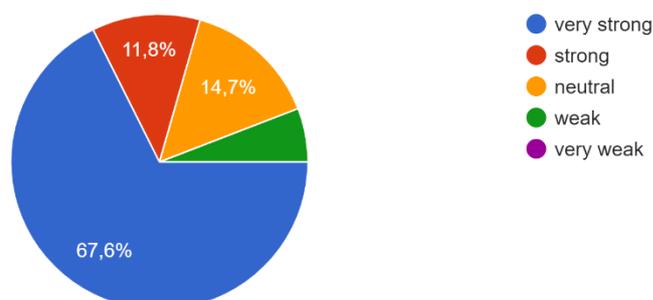


Figure 9

What has been the impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown on the inclusion, participation and well-being of vulnerable and at risk young people and their access to rights and services?

34 Antworten



The impact on young people at risk was perceived in most countries as a lot stronger than for youth in general. (Figures 8 and 9). Socio-economic disadvantages also made the situation worse for at risk groups, since in many countries access to digital infrastructure is not equally distributed. Many young people at risk were neither reached by formal education online offers nor by informal youth work offers.

The group that was hit most severely by the lockdown was young people with special needs; in many cases, they could not receive the services they needed and social distancing was more harmful for them.

The main consequences of the lockdown for young people can be summarised as follows:

- **Loss of social contacts:** In most countries this had a very dramatic affect on young people and isolation at home increased family tensions and problems.
- **Anxiety:** In general, the level of anxiety increased among young people. Mixed public messaging on how to deal with the impact of the pandemic also caused additional anxiety. Many young people felt responsible for the health of their families, while others just felt insecure for themselves.
- **Mental health:** The lack of personal meetings with their friends and classmates increased anxieties as well. Little psychological support appears to have been offered to young people.
- **Decrease in participation in decision making:** Young people were seldom consulted regarding new structures for learning.
- **Violation of rights of the child:** This topic was mentioned in various aspects, be it increased violence in families, less support from child care organisations, and lack of opportunities for participation.
- **Unemployment:** Young people were hit very hard by the economic impact of the pandemic. Unemployment among young people at risk, often less educated or with a migrant background, appears to have increased during the lockdown

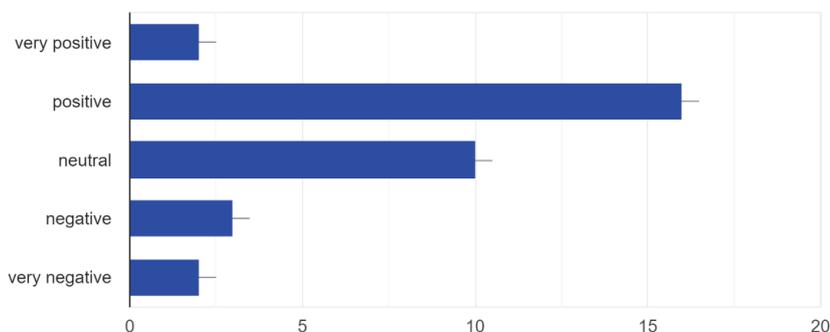
- **Education:** In many countries the accessibility of online classes was a big challenge – because of both technical equipment shortages and inadequate digital skills. Online schooling was often poorly prepared and many children and young people were overburdened with the task of self-organised learning.
- **Increased social differences:** All of the above increased social differences during the lockdown.
- **Exception:** Some young people, already excluded from many opportunities due to disability, did welcome increased opportunities to participate in virtual settings for formal education and informal offers.

## The response of young people and youth representative bodies to the lockdown

The response of youth representative bodies and of young people was rather diverse among countries, ranging from the very negative to the very positive with the majority of response being positive or very positive (Figure 10).

Figure 10

What has been the response of young people and youth representative bodies to the lockdown?  
32 Antworten



Different approaches could be seen in different countries. Information and lobbying were the main responses of the youth representative bodies. The Austrian national youth council was

involved in the creation of information material for youth NGOs (e.g. regarding the impact on summer camps) and for young people directly. In Croatia, the national umbrella association presented to government their requests for a structured operational plan of support for young people during the pandemic. They have also taken part in several actions on raising awareness on the deterioration of youth well-being, mental health, social status and access to rights. In Cyprus, student organisations established info-points for students / citizens residing abroad on how to return home to Cyprus. Many organisations ran online social media campaigns and online activities for young people - such as photo contests and online gym sessions. Awareness raising and lobbying was also part of the work of national youth councils, such as in Finland. The association of NGOs in Norway issued an infection control guide for youth NGOs.

Young people's responses were described as focussing on the challenges they experienced (e.g. in Belgium and Bulgaria) or how they started self-organised responses (e.g. Belarus and the Czech Republic).

The responses of young people and youth representative bodies can be summarised as follows:

- **Information:** Youth representative bodies, student councils, and youth councils started awareness raising campaigns, and offering information and guidelines on COVID-19. In some countries they also issued position papers. Direct support for young people was also offered - how to deal with the situation of exams, how to deal with the danger of losing your job.
- **Voluntarism:** Many young people showed an immediate reaction to the challenges posed by the lockdown and other measures by offering support to neighbours - caring, shopping, walking the dog, support with online skills.
- **Solidarity:** Instances were reported of young people acting with solidarity, such as through sharing online supports.

- **Stress reactions:** In many countries, the effect of the lockdown on young people's mental health was also pointed out. This resulted from a number of factors: lack of access to education and the pressure to pass exams; tensions and conflicts within families; lack of parental support for learning at home; and absence of parents in essential professions who had to go to work and were exposed to higher risks of infection.
- **Dis(obedience):** It was highlighted that in many countries most young people accepted restrictions and did not show any forms of protest in the first weeks of the lockdown. However, the longer the lockdown lasted, the more violations of the rules were reported. Inability to meet up with friends became an issue. In some countries, illegal private parties became a problem. With the loosening of the strict regulations however, outdoor activities again became more common..

## Policy-implications for future youth policy resulting from the lockdown.

What are seen as the most significant short-to-medium term policy challenges facing the youth sector in countries as a result of the pandemic? The majority of responses pointed to two different challenges: a) on youth work structures and b) on the direct impact on young people.

- **Funding / support structures:** Youth work has to be supported and promoted in various ways. i) Funding and financial support has to be sustainable so youth work and youth NGOs are enabled not only to maintain their offers in times of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic but can plan for the future. ii) The infrastructure for youth work has to be revised: are facilities big enough and sufficiently equipped to offer quality youth work in times of strict health regulations? iii) Recognition of youth work as an important means to support young people has to be promoted.

- **Access to digital tools/ digital competences of youth workers:** Access to digital tools has to be ensured to provide alternative ways to reach the target groups. Youth workers have to be able to access and work with digital youth work services and also from home office settings. Additionally, the digital skills of youth workers have to be promoted to enable quality digital youth work.
- **New ways to reach youth:** The pandemic showed that youth work is mainly using traditional ways to reach young people. Digitalization can reach other target groups and involve them in youth work and out-reach offers could provide alternatives to traditional indoor group meetings.
- **Ensure equal opportunities (access to resources, access to rights):** The most challenging task for a horizontal youth policy will be to decrease social inequalities among young people. The pandemic showed that due to the lockdown of schools, many pupils were not reached with digital tools. This, as a consequence of various factors, cannot be solved by one policy field alone: access to digital infrastructure is in many countries not equally distributed, and in many cases rural areas are disadvantaged since they have slower and weaker internet connections. Young people from economically disadvantage backgrounds often lack access to basic infrastructure, e.g. in big families children have access to only one computer and therefore cannot participate easily in online meetings. The lack of a big enough working space is another issue. Family support is closely connected to the education background of the parents and their socio-economic status. The infrastructure available for teachers in schools is not always equally distributed in some countries.
- **Mental health:** The pandemic showed the need to invest in mental health support for young people. The consequences of the pandemic for the mental health of youth cannot be estimated as yet.
- **Participation / involvement:** A strong emphasis was put on the topic of involvement in decision making in situations of crisis. The level of participation of young people and many youth representative bodies in European countries was often very low. Young people were forced to react but were not seen as agents of change.

- **Economy / Youth unemployment:** The possibility of an economic crisis following on the health crisis was also highlighted and the consequences for young people where, in many countries, unemployment rates among young people are higher than for the general population.

## Summary

The lockdown commenced in mid-March across Europe and lasted for on average some two months, with countries coming out of lockdown from early June, though some form of intermittent lockdown continued in some countries for longer. In most countries, the lockdown was at national level and general across Europe. Communication during the lockdown was targeted at the population in general rather than specific categories, such as young people. There was also some evidence of poor communication and mixed messaging in responses to the pandemic. Some countries did aim at communication directly with children and young people, whether through television, social media platforms, relevant ministries and state bodies for young people and NGOs. The main focus of these direct communications was on health and safety issues relating to the pandemic and on how to deal with being housebound.

In most countries, state funding for the youth sector appears to have remained relatively consistent during the lockdown. However, there does appear to be some variation as between funding at national, regional and local level. There is also evidence of funding being cut, particularly at local level, or redirected, delayed, cancelled or postponed. Countries where funding for the youth sector is largely focused on project-based activities carried out by youth NGOs and largely dependent on European, international, or intermittent state funding, appear to have been more adversely affected by the lockdown. However, some countries did respond to the need for additional funding. While state funding remained relatively stable during the lockdown, there are concerns that a long period of social distancing over the coming year may lead to greater financial pressure on the youth sector.

The impact of the lockdown on the employment and working condition of youth workers in most countries was significant. In many countries, youth workers, to varying degrees, experienced reduced working hours, changes in working conditions, adoption of new practices - digitalization - and in some instances, uncertain employment. There is also some evidence of variation at nation and local level as regards pay and conditions. In some instances, youth workers had no experience with providing youth work online or did not have adequate IT training, resources or supports. There were countries, however, where the lockdown on youth workers' employment and working conditions appears to be small. The impact of the lockdown on the employment and working conditions of youth workers appears to highlight, and in some instances exacerbate, existing problems and issues. In those countries where youth work is more professionalized, youth workers appeared to have greater job security and conditions of employment during the lockdown.

The impact of the lockdown and pandemic on state operated programmes and youth work services was also significant. The requirements of social distancing during the lockdown severely impacted on youth sector programmes and activities and also reflected the importance of the physical environment and face-to-face contact in the sector. While online and digitalized approaches were adopted, there was a lack of capacity, resources and training in some countries as well as an urban/rural divide in some instances. Young people at risk also appear to have been more severely impacted. There is, however, evidence that many countries were proactive and innovative in their responses. Working groups and joint ventures were convened, there was an increase in online services and use of online support programmes and social media platforms, as well as enhanced IT training.

One reason for the relatively mixed response of state operated programmes during the lockdown may relate to their lack of both capacity and ability to adapt and transfer from a physical environment to a digital environment.

The impact on the NGO sector was perceived as very strong, since in most countries all activities were suspended during the lockdown and afterwards started only with additional restrictions which made the ongoing work challenging. On the other hand, the transfer to online activities served as a solution for the provision of youth work by NGOs. Many youth workers in NGOs started offering special information and support for young people regarding the pandemic and the lockdown. Training and technical support for the NGOs were available in some countries – organised by umbrella organisations of NGOs.

The impact of the lockdown and other measures owing to the pandemic on NGOs was very negative in terms of financial support. In some countries, the funding ceased during the lockdown, in others, support for volunteers could not be guaranteed. The planning for future activities also became problematic.

Many youth organisations became very active and innovative in offering alternative options or transferring face-to-face activities online. Information and counselling for young people was also moved from face-to-face contacts to other media.

The pandemic, the lockdown and other measures had a strong impact on young people. Vulnerable youth and young people at risk experienced further disadvantages. Socio-economic reasons and lack of digital skills were big obstacles to participation in online activities and even distance learning became more challenging for disadvantaged young people than for others. This led to an intensification of social differences.

The strong decrease in social contacts was perceived as the most challenging issue for young people, as well as education issues (distance learning), unemployment, and increased stress and anxiety.

Young people reacted adversely to the health situation and the implications of the lockdown, but with increased engagement in voluntary activities to support vulnerable

people, particularly the elderly . The generally acceptance of the rules imposed on group meetings, social distancing, hygiene and mask wearing was reflected in many countries.

Youth representative bodies responded to the pandemic with increased information for young people on COVID-19 and on the lockdown rules or the impact on particular situations e.g. student's exam rules. Beside this direct contact with young people these bodies were also active in lobbying for young people – especially regarding education, equal opportunities, access to rights, and participation.

The main challenges for youth policy were seen as guaranteeing sustainable funding and financial support for the sector and better access to digitalization through enhanced digital skills and improved technical equipment. The pandemic showed that further promotion of equal opportunities for all young people is essential and therefore must be a mid- and long-term priority for youth policy. Together with other policy fields, youth mental health issues and unemployment, in particular, need to be further addressed.

## Conclusions

There are a number of general conclusions that might be made on the responses to the survey.

By and large, the findings emerging from the survey are broadly in line and supportive of findings from other recent surveys conducted on the impact of the pandemic on youth people and youth organisations, including the Joint Council on Youth's (CJM's), "Effects of Covid-19 cross youth work and youth activities"; and the RAY Networks' "Survey on the impact of the corona pandemic on youth work in Europe – in the European Youth Programmes and beyond".

The impact of the pandemic and the lockdown also tended to highlight and reinforce a known dichotomy in the youth sector in Europe. In those countries where the youth sector, including youth work services and other supports for young people and youth organisations, are long established, policy or legally based, publicly funded and where youth workers have job stability, the impact of the pandemic and the lockdown, was less severe and the response more managed. In those countries that did not have these underpinning supports, the impact of the pandemic and the lockdown was more severe and less well managed.

The most salient aspect of the pandemic and the lockdown across Europe for young people, as well as for everyone, was that it resulted in a more restrictive lifestyle, limited access to education, work and services, as well as to rights and self-isolation and social distancing. Disadvantaged and at risk young people suffered disproportionately in terms of the consequences of the lockdown.

Virtually overnight, the youth sector moved from a predominantly physical environment to a predominantly virtual environment. While online and digitalized approaches were adopted to varying degrees by different countries, there was a lack of capacity, resources and training to sustain programmes and services and hold the attention of young people over the period of the lockdown.

While digitalization and virtual or online platforms can never replace the physical environment, face-to-face, dimension of the youth sector, neither perhaps should they be seen as a mere adjunct, add-on, or supplement, but rather as a complementary and mutually supportive process. Accordingly, there may be an emerging need for greater policy focus and long-term investment in digitalization for the youth sector at country and European level.

The survey points to the adverse affect the pandemic and the lockdown had on voluntary youth NGOs, in particular, which are often largely dependent on European funding programmes in some countries. If voluntary youth NGOs are to be revitalised after the pandemic and further strengthened, more and regular financial support may be required to enhance their ongoing financial, physical and human resource capacities in particular.