

Youth Partnership

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

Summary analysis of the EKCYP survey

By James Donovan and Manfred Zentner

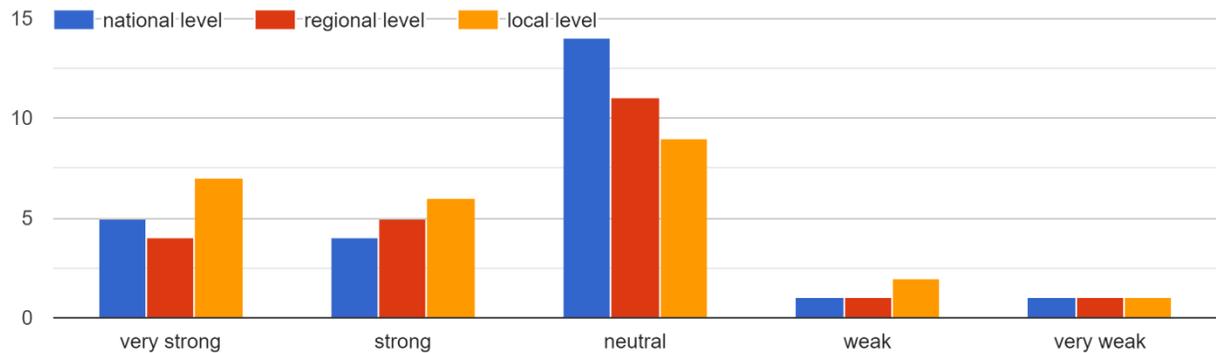
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Lockdown measures communicated to young people and advice given as to staying safe.

- As of 12 October 2020 we have responses from 24 countries; some countries have submitted two returns from respective correspondents.
- 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. though some form of intermittent lockdown continued in some countries for longer.
- The lockdown for the most part was at national level and general across Europe (84%). While there were some partial lockdowns (Norway), Sweden and Belarus appear to be the only countries that did not have a lockdown, though measures were adopted to counter the pandemic.
- Communication during the lockdown was targeted at the population in general rather than specific categories, such as young people. There was also some evidence as to poor communication and mixed messaging in responses to the pandemic.
- Some countries did aim at communication directly with young people, whether through television, social media, relevant ministries and state bodies for young people and NGOs.

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:

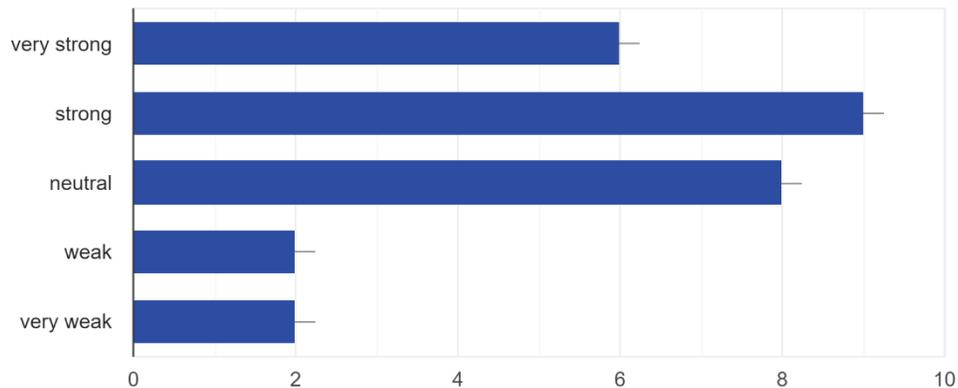


Impact of COVID-19, the lockdown and other measures on public funding for the youth sector, including the voluntary youth sector.

- For most countries the impact on public funding was either neutral, strong or very strong. 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. However, there does appear to be some variation as between funding at national, regional and local level. There is some evidence of funding being increased, or directed towards alternative channels e.g. digitilisation. There is also some evidence of funding being redirected to other sectors and of municipalities, local projects and initiatives and calls for projects being more adversely affected.
- 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.

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

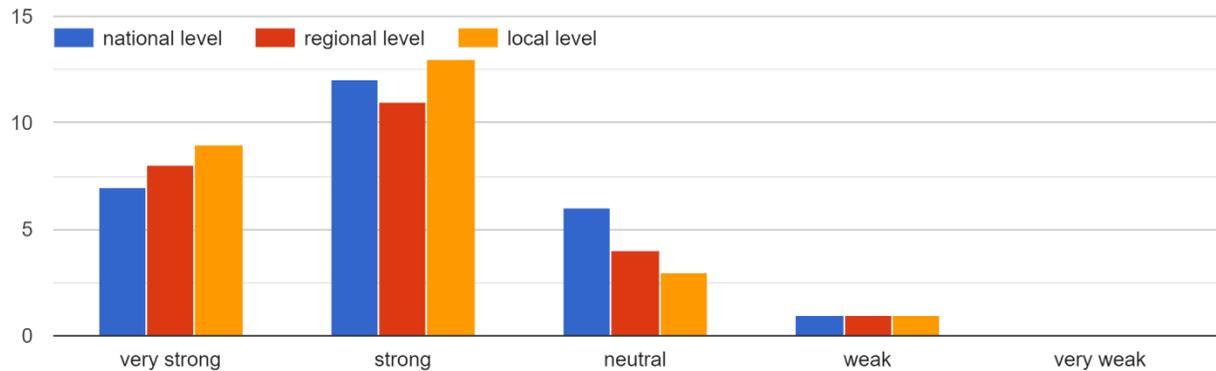
27 Antworten



The 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.
- In countries that depend largely on NGO and European or irregular funding, youth workers have seen reduced hours, changes in working conditions (working mainly from home), adoption of new practices - digitization - and job insecurity.
- The pandemic appears to have highlighted and exacerbated issues relating to youth workers employment and conditions.
- There is also some evidence of variation at nation, regional and local level as regards pay and conditions.
- In those countries where youth work is more professionalised, youth workers appeared to have greater job security and conditions of employment.

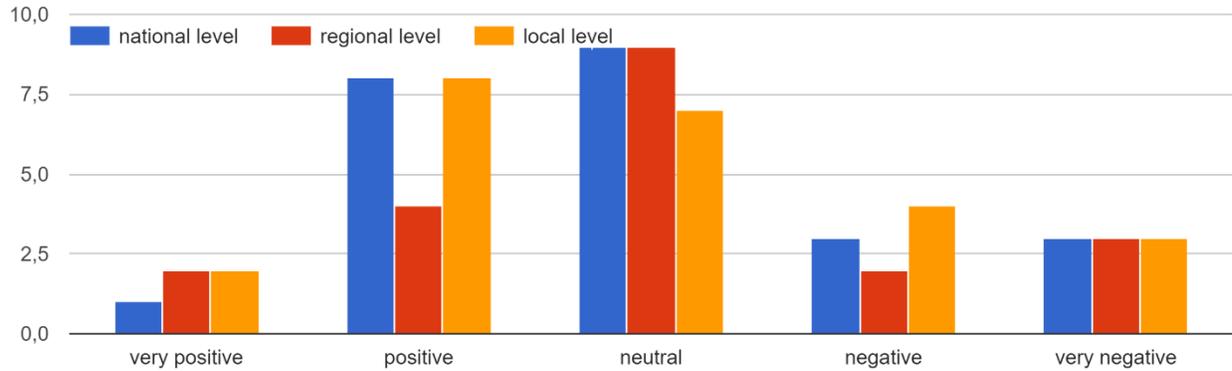
What has been the impact of COVID-19, the lockdown and other measures on state operated programmes, youth work services and other supports for young people at



The 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.
- 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 now policy measures being delayed or postponed.

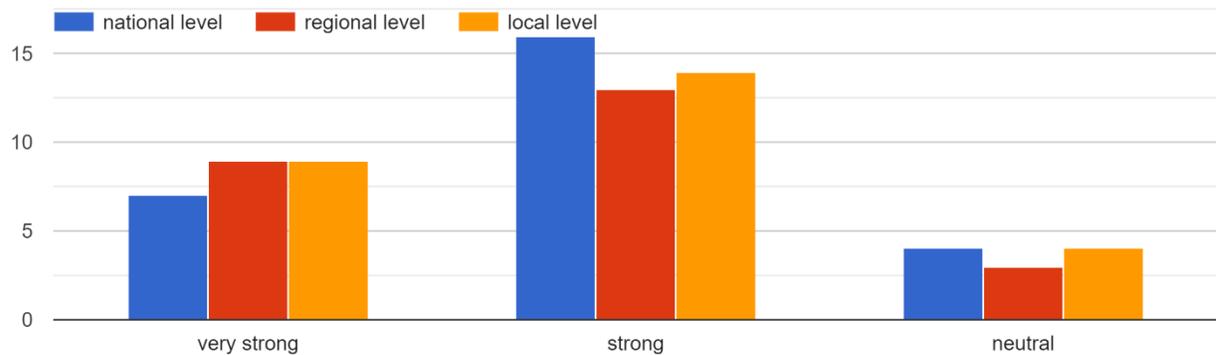
How effectively did state operated programmes, youth work services and other supports for young people, respond to the lockdown at



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 of them were proactive in their responses.
- Working groups were convened and new initiatives adopted in some countries to counteract the impact of the pandemic particularly among young people at risk.
- Youth services in a number of countries were put online.
- There was also an increase in digitalized and outreach services.

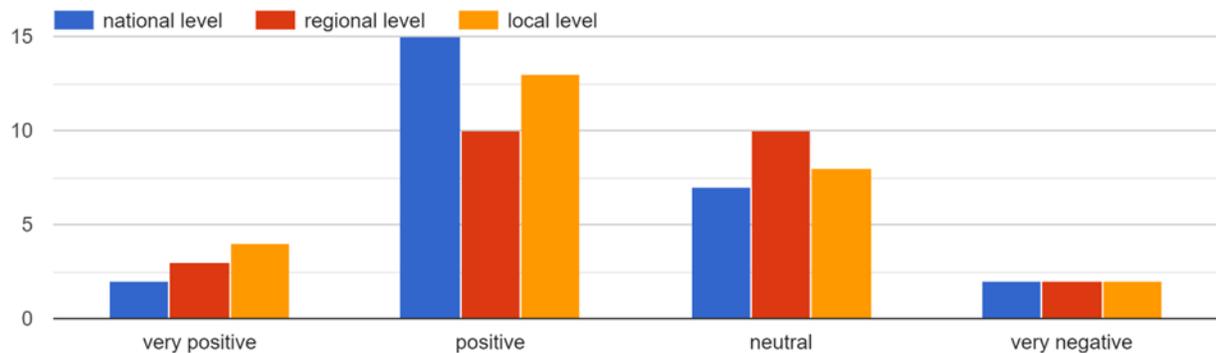
What has been the impact of COVID-19, the lockdown and other measures on NGO sector programmes, youth work services and other supports for young people at



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 few cases youth centres were kept open (with certain regulations: small groups, outside of facilities,...). Many youth NGOs could not reach the young persons, they are working with, any longer 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 in other cases these activities had to be reorganised. Registration of names for contact tracing was mentioned as a challenge.
2. Financial: In some countries calls for funding of youth work projects were suspended, so future planning gets more difficult. In countries where youth work is dependent on membership / tuition fees sustainability of youth work is endangered 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 with longer tradition in digital / smart youth work the adjustment went smoothly: both youth workers and young people were used to use digital offers. 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 online new activities to form alternatives to those that were not available anymore. Voluntary activities increased and youth NGOs supported their members in helping others (e.g. support for elderly in the neighbourhood).

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



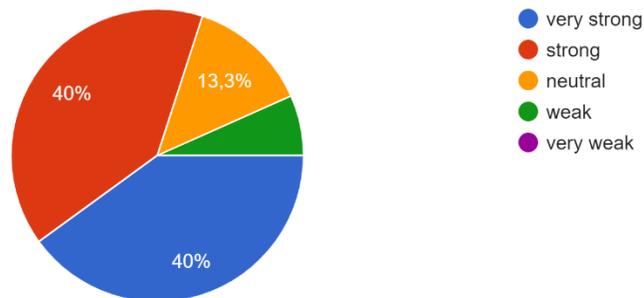
Regarding the respond of the NGO sector to the lockdown the survey showed three main reactions:

1. **Diversion to online activities:** Since in situ meetings with young people were not possible any longer during the lockdown, many (youth) 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 on educational and entertaining 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, youth telephone support and more
2. **Information:** Many NGOs started providing online information on issues relevant to young people in connection with Covid-19: awareness raising on why to stay home, tips on how to stay healthy, understandable information on the Covid-19 situation in the country, easy accessible information on rules and regulations. Also legal information and counselling was offered to young people breaching the Covid-19 regulations. A second important target group for information were youth workers and volunteers in the NGO sector. They were in need of information on the impact of measures, e.g. under which prerequisites they are still allowed to run activities.
3. **Health support activities:** Thus 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 the young people

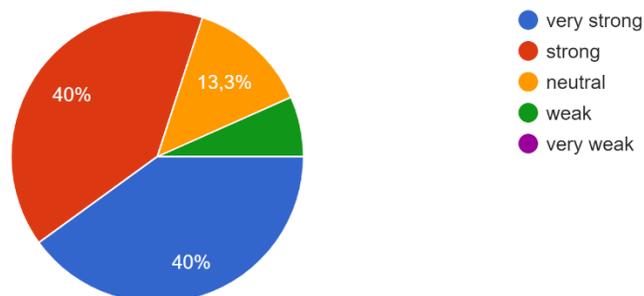
What has been the impact of COVID-19, the lockdown and other measures on the inclusion, participation and well-being of young people and their access to rights and services?

30 Antworten



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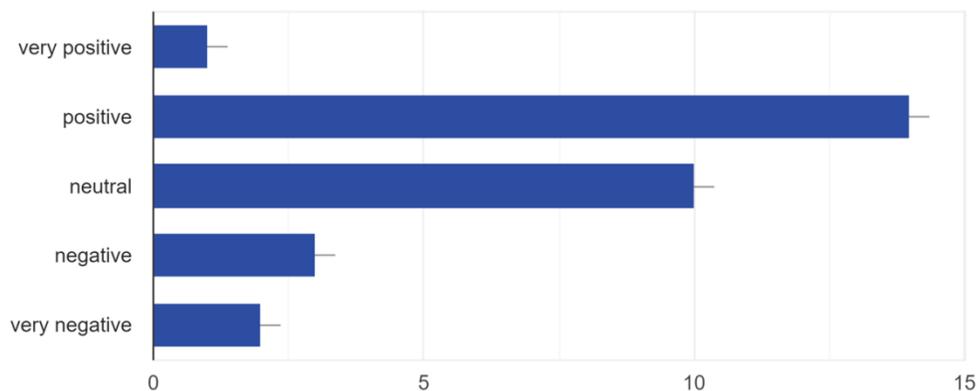
Already the diagrams highlight that the impact on young people at risk was perceived as a lot stronger than on youth in general. Especially socio-economic disadvantages hardened the situation for at risk groups, since in many countries access to digital infrastructure is still not equally distributed. Many young people at risk were neither reached by formal education online offers nor by informal youth work offers. The second group that was hit more severely by the effects of the lockdown were young people with special needs; in many cases they could not receive the services they need and social distancing was more harmful for them as for others.

- **Anxiety:** In general, the level of anxiety increased among young people. The official public communication was in many countries focussing on highlighting possible dangers of ongoing contacts. In other cases, it was the opposite by pointing out that Covid-19 can be tackled in similar ways than any other influenza. Many young people felt responsible for the health of their families, others just felt insecure for themselves.

- **Mental health:** The lack of personal meetings with their friends and classmates increased anxieties as well. No psychological support was offered for young people.
- **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, lack of opportunities for participation and more
- **Unemployment:** Youth was hit very hard by the economic impact of the Covid-19 crisis. Youth at risk, often less educated or with migrant background, was already before the Covid-19 crisis affected strongly by unemployment, but this strengthened during the lockdown
- Increased social differences: all the mentioned above, increased social differences in the times of and after the lockdown.
- Exception: Some of those youth that were already before excluded from many opportunities due to certain forms of immobility did feel better starting chances to participate in virtual settings for formal education and informal offers.

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

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The response of the youth representative bodies and of young people was rather diverse among the countries spanning from very negative to very positive with the majority of seeing the response positive or very positive.

The answers can be group regarding the response of representative bodies, which focused on information, and of youth in general.

- Information: Youth representative bodies, student councils, and youth councils started awareness raising campaigns, and offering information and guidelines on Covid-19. Furthermore

in some countries they also issued position papers. Also direct support for young people was offered (how to deal with the situation of exams, how to deal with the danger of losing the job...)

On the individual level three dimensions were pointed out strongly: the direct reaction to the installation of new regulations for meetings, the growth in solidarity, and health reactions.

- **Voluntarism:** Many young people showed an immediate reaction to the challenges induced by the lockdown and other measures by offering support to neighbors (caring, shopping, walking the dog, support with online skills, ...). But also solidarity actions among youth were reported – mostly concerning online learning support.
- **Stress reactions:** On the other hand in many countries the effect of the lockdown on the mental health situation was pointed out. This concerned the reaction on not having sufficient access to education infrastructure but still the pressure to pass exams. Also the relation to parents had influence on the stress level of young people: inner-familial conflicts increased in some cases significantly, in other cases the lack of parental support for learning issues was mentioned. Last but not least the concern for parents in essential professions that had to go to work and were exposed to higher risk factors of infection.
- **Dis(obedience):** It was highlighted that in many countries in general the young people accepted all restrictions and did not show any forms of protests in the first weeks of the lockdown. Protest were rather driven by adults than by youth. But the longer the lockdown lasted the more violations of the rules were reported. Especially meeting friends when it was forbidden became an issue. With the loosening of the strict regulations outdoor activities gained more impetus. In some countries illegal private parties became a problem.

The most significant short-to-medium term policy challenges facing the youth sector in your country as a result of the pandemic?

The majority of answers 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. Firstly funding and financial support has to be sustainable so youth work and youth NGOs are enabled to uphold their offers in phases of crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic and also can plan for the future. Secondly the infrastructure for youth work has to be revised: are facilities big enough and sufficiently equipped to offer quality youth work also in times of strict health regulations? And thirdly recognition of youth work as important means to support young people has to be furthermore promoted.
- **Access to digital tools/ digital competences of youth work:** Closely connected to the infrastructure of the youth field is the access to digital tools which has to be ensured to have alternative ways to reach the target groups. Youth workers have to be able to access and work with digital youth work services also from home office settings. But also the digital skills of youth workers have to be promoted to enable quality digital youth work.
- **New ways to reach youth:** Furthermore, it was mentioned that the pandemic showed that youth work is mainly using traditional ways to reach young people. Digital offers allow to reach to

other target groups and involve them in youth work. But also out-reach offers might provide alternatives for classical indoor group meetings.

- **Ensure equal opportunities (access to resources, access to rights):** The most challenging task for a horizontal youth policy will be the decrease of social inequalities between 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, can not be solved by one policy field alone: access to digital infrastructure is in many countries not equally distributed, in many cases rural surroundings are disadvantaged since they have slower and weaker internet connections. On the other hand youth from economic disadvantage background often lack the access to the basic needed infrastructure, e.g. in big families children have access to only one computer and therefore can not participate easily in online meetings. Lack of working space is another issue. But also the infrastructure in schools is often not equally distributed in the countries. Also the inner-familial support is closely connected to education background of the parents and socio-economic status.
- **Mental health:** The pandemic showed the need to invest in mental health support for young people. It also was mentioned that the consequences of the pandemic for the mental health of youth can not be estimated now.
- **Participation / involvement:** A strong emphasis was laid on the topic of involvement in decision making in situations of crisis. The degree of participation of young people but also of youth representative bodies in European countries was often very low. Young people were forced to react but were not seen as an agent for their own account.
- **Economy / Youth unemployment:** Often mentioned was also the challenge of an economic crisis that will follow the health crisis in short time and the consequences this will have for young people especially since in many countries it was registered that the impact of the crisis on unemployment rates was higher for youth than for the general population.

Most positive features of the impact on and the response of the youth sector

- Development of digital skills in the sector
- Realising that many meetings can be put online
- Cooperation between NGOs and youth centres
- Intergenerational solidarity / voluntarism
- Investment in infrastructure (from school toilets to free computers)
- Distance learning / remote jobs

Most negative features of the impact on and the response of the youth sector

- Mental health situation (loss of social contacts)
- Closure of facilities (schools and youth centres) – increase of social divide

- Local disadvantages (e.g. fast online access of people in rural areas, in urban regions less opportunities to go out)
- Lack of strategy in the sector – most organisations were following their own approach
- Bad / tragic communication strategy of the governments
- Blame on young people to endanger elderly / stereotyping of youth not complying with safety measures
- Youth unemployment
- Prove of lack of digital skills and digital resources in the youth field