

Youth Partnership

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



Covid-19 impact on youth participation and youth spaces

Research report

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November 2022

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1. The shrinking of civic space – a global trend

For some time now, we have been witnessing an increase in anti-democratic tendencies throughout the democratic world, accompanied by human rights violations and a dramatic decline in social, civic and associational life. Affected democratic societies that are losing their stability and legitimacy are increasingly described as milieus that are experiencing various gaps (e.g. in governance, empowerment, opportunity) and/or reverse transitions (Buyse 2018). A vibrant and open civic space is a crucial component of a stable democracy that protects diversity, promotes tolerance and guarantees respect for human and citizenship rights and liberties. As a space of free and non-coercive association, civil society plays a central role in the associational life of a community's members, providing a platform for dialogue among a diversity of voices as well as the free exchange of information among civil society actors. It is the "place that civil society actors occupy within society; the environment and framework in which civil society operates; and the relationships between civil society actors, the state, the private sector and the public" (FRA 2017).

An open civil society is therefore one of the most important safeguards against tyranny and oppression. At the same time, civil society organisations (CSOs) also amplify the voices of minorities and other vulnerable groups by making more visible the key issues (and related problems) they face. Youth CSOs that engage young people in civic life are particularly important because these organisations take up issues specific to youth, put them on the public and political agenda and seek innovative solutions on the ground. As laboratories of democracy, youth civil society organisations and young people in general have been an important catalyst for various social innovations. Debates on the status, value and challenges facing civil societies in both democratic and non-democratic systems emphasise the idea of civil society as a crucial site for the development and pursuit of basic liberal values such as individual freedom, social pluralism and democratic citizenship (Kymlicka and Chambers 2001).

Despite the central role that CSOs, including youth organisations, play in promoting and protecting basic human rights and democracy, civil society has been increasingly silenced in recent years, which has significantly narrowed the civil society space. As a virtual or physical space for expression and action, the civic space constituted around freedoms of expression, association and assembly is therefore less and less able to enable citizens to debate and exchange information, organise and act. The ways in which civic space is shrinking are

manifold and have primarily to do with the actions of those in political power who threaten freedom of assembly, association and speech, usually under the guise of security.

These measures could include legal restrictions (including criminalisation) and financial barriers to the independent press; the imposition of restrictions, barriers and/or limitations on participation in civil society (CSOs and/or movements) as members and/or volunteers; ignoring the demands and (civil and political) rights of ethnic, religious or other minorities; or withdrawing legal protection for ethnic, religious and/or other minorities. It could also be that government bodies do not listen to and/or consider the demands of certain groups, either in parliament or in public discourse, or that economic restrictions are imposed. Public funds could also be reserved for those CSOs and/or initiatives that follow the lead of existing government bodies. A common feature of the shrinking civic space is the pressure exerted on activists. The pressure exerted on them consists of a repertoire of different methods used by both state and non-state actors, ranging from stigmatisation, surveillance, harassment, abuse, physical violence to prosecution through criminal prosecution (Amnesty International 2017). In many countries, authorities do not investigate or prosecute such threats and violence and rarely respond appropriately when an individual defender is killed or seriously injured. This inaction creates conditions of impunity, thereby giving perpetrators carte blanche to make repeated threats and attacks (Amnesty International 2017: 9).

The shrinking of civic space goes beyond “democracies at risk” and has become a global trend that has been gaining momentum for more than a decade (see Nazarski 2017), representing a new era of limited freedoms and increased state control that could undermine social, political and economic stability and increase the risk of geopolitical and social conflict (WEF 2017: 29). This broad pattern of contraction affects countries regardless of their traditional differences, including socio-political context, development of democratic institutions, wealth, human rights record, geographical location, etc. (Youngs and Echagüe 2017: 5). This is shown by various national reports as well as international observers, as the tendency to “control” public space is not limited to authoritarian regimes and also occurs in more established democracies in the name of “public security” (Hummel et al. 2020). Leading international watchdogs and intergovernmental organisations in the field have recognised that civic space is under threat. The Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights reported on measures restricting the

activities of civil society organisations inside and outside Europe, and Amnesty International (2018: 46) points out that the space for civil society in Europe continues to shrink. Civicus' monitor of civil society space around the world clearly shows that Europe is not an oasis among regions impeding civic space, and that European countries are just as often on the special watch list used to closely monitor developments in order to put pressure on governments (see Civicus 2020).

2. Shrinking civic space for young people

When it comes to the impact of shrinking civic space on youth, many dimensions of a healthy democratic society are at risk. In terms of legitimacy, the withdrawal of young people from the political system can be detrimental to the governance of society and the health of democracy. Civic engagement of young people contributes to their personal development, the promotion of well-being and the fight against injustice, and brings greater attention to youth work and youth engagement as generators of this engagement (see Shaw 2014: 2). An open civic space provides opportunities for young people to share their experiences and take an active role in community life. The increased interest in youth civic engagement is therefore crucial, as young people's social progress depends on exercising their core civic space freedoms, tolerant and inclusive environments, and adequate educational opportunities. Civic spaces for young people are environments that foster young people's participation in civic action – pathways, structures and means that provide opportunities for young people to engage in critical discussions, dialogues and actions. This includes the formal and informal places where youth civic engagement can take place.

The closure of civic space has a disproportionately negative impact on the exercise of young people's exercise of their basic civil rights and their well-being in general, as well as on the functioning of youth CSOs. Amnesty International reports (2017: 37) that youth human rights defenders are one of the most vulnerable groups of human rights defenders, as they are at the bottom of many hierarchies and face age-based discrimination that intersects with other forms of oppression. Young activists are subject to gender-based pressure, physical violence, including sexual violence, threats, harassment and defamation campaigns, mainly from third parties who are not persecuted by governments (see Amnesty International 2017). Amnesty International's report on human rights defenders also clearly indicates that youth-led civil

society groups and young people are often important agents of change and can make significant contributions to human rights, but remain vulnerable to undue restrictions and persecution.

The expansion of civic space through ICT innovations has created a number of opportunities to amplify the voice(s) of young people and other vulnerable social groups. At the same time, however, ICT is also an important area for enforcing surveillance, online censorship, control and criminalisation of dissent. Reports by major INGOs, e.g. HRW's World Report 2016, indicate that monitoring the online activities of CSOs has become an important part of both democratic and non-democratic governments' intimidation strategies in the name of national security or prevention of alleged foreign interference. State censorship of critical or dissenting voices therefore has a serious negative impact on young people and their exercise of basic civil rights. Many are denied many basic civil liberties that most other people take for granted. Most are denied basic rights such as political suffrage (the right to vote) or the right to have a say in decisions that directly affect them (Bessant 2012: 250-51).

The interplay of social exclusion, unemployment and changing patterns of participation in both "offline" and "online" spaces (e.g. social media) makes young people the most vulnerable social group when it comes to closing the gap between the "open" and the "unfree" public space. At the same time, we need to emphasise that young people's experiences are not homogeneous, as they simultaneously have several interlinked affiliations, resulting in an experience of interrelated and intersecting systems of discrimination or disadvantage based on gender, sexual orientation, ethnic, cultural, religious identity, etc. (see Crenshaw 1991). Although cross-national comparisons highlight the difficult situations in which young people find themselves in certain settings, it is crucial to be aware not only of the similarities but also the differences between young people in accessing opportunities.

One of the rare international comparative studies of shrinking civic space for youth (Deželan et al. 2020) found that youth are either present but underrepresented and have limited access to civic space, or are largely or completely marginalised, and this pattern is observed across Europe. Furthermore, it is reported that human rights and fundamental freedoms for young people and their representatives are not always respected. To be precise, freedom from

political pressure is not secured for large parts of the organisations, and government interference in the work of the organisations is also common. About one third of the organisations do not have access to information from government sources, and one fifth of the organisations cannot express themselves freely without fear of retaliation. A similarly worrying pattern was found in the case of rights of assembly and association, as 14% of organisations reported significant difficulties in organising or participating in public meetings or demonstrations. In the case of advocacy activities, 14% of organisations undertaking such activities feared reprisals.

In the case of citizen participation – the extent to which individuals and organisations representing them are allowed to contribute to and influence public policy processes – one third of organisations faced difficulties when trying to participate in policy deliberation and decision-making processes, with about one tenth of them on the verge of being excluded from these processes. The willingness of the authorities to recognise opinions also proved to be a serious obstacle, with half of the organisations stating that their opinions were rarely or never taken into account. This is supported by the fact that about two fifths of the organisations reported considerable difficulty in influencing or no possibility of influencing decision-making processes, which is an important sign of youth disempowerment. In addition to some of the traditional dimensions of monitoring change in the civil society space, there are processes that have serious consequences for the way these organisations operate. A third of the organisations reported difficulties due to the need to demonstrate a diversified financial profile, diversity of donors, amount of private funds raised, nationwide impact, etc. Overall, it should be stressed that about two thirds of organisations across Europe are feeling the consequences of this technocratic agenda and find it disturbing.

Covid-19 has dramatically changed the way democratic societies function, in particular by limiting the possibility of direct human contact due to social distancing measures and by changing the way education systems and the world of work function. Basic civil rights (freedom of expression, association and assembly) were severely affected, and this was despite the fact that ICT tools offered alternative ways to curb measures aimed at physical distancing. Although these responses to Covid-19 are changing and adapting to health realities, some long-term changes are already evident, and post-pandemic recovery plans

offer insights that make this crisis similar to previous ones, i.e. leaving behind the most vulnerable, numerically weak and economically less interesting people. The aim of this study is therefore to examine the impact of Covid-19 on the civic space for young people and the general level of civic engagement of young people, taking into account the dramatic changes in the civic space described above. We first examine the findings of other studies looking at the impact of Covid-19 on different areas of the youth field and on young people, and then present the impact of Covid-19 on youth participation and civic space as revealed by the survey conducted among youth organisations across Europe.

3. Existing evidence on the impact of Covid-19 on the youth sector

In 2020, the Youth Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe supported two studies that examined the impact of Covid-19 on the youth sector. The *Meta-analysis of research on the impact of Covid-19 on the youth sector* examined data from several studies on the topic conducted between April and December 2020. It focused on the most affected areas in the youth sector: education and mobility, youth employment, youth work and youth organisations, mental health and well-being, youth participation, digitalisation and artificial intelligence, social inclusion and national realities. The study found that “young people are disproportionately affected by the Covid 19 pandemic compared to other population groups” (Lavizzari et al. 2020: 17). This is due to several factors, such as the closure of schools and universities, the increase in unemployment, lack of opportunities for (learning) mobilities and social interactions. Analysis of existing research has also shown that marginalised, migrant, homeless and LGBTQ+ youth are particularly vulnerable and more affected than the general population of young people. In the pandemic period, the digitalisation of the youth sector has made significant progress. Its positive impact is recognised as enabling the continuation of educational processes and youth work, and providing options for seeking support and guidance during times of closure and social isolation. However, the problem of unequal access of young people to technology and online activities has emerged. This is the area that deserves immediate attention, particularly with regard to the inclusion of different groups of young people, especially disadvantaged young people.

Another study entitled “Towards a better understanding of COVID-19 impact on the youth sector” examined data collected through a questionnaire distributed to correspondents of the

European Knowledge Centre on Youth Policy (EKCY) and the Pool of European Youth Researchers (PEYR) (O'Donovan and Zentner 2020). The main objective of the study was to identify the impact of the pandemic on the youth sector, in particular on initiatives relating to youth policy, youth work and support for youth organisations. The study identified several pandemic-related risks for youth: loss of social contacts and increased family tensions, increased anxiety, mental health problems, reduced participation in decision making, increased likelihood of unemployment, reduced access to education and increased social inequalities. The responses of young people and youth councils included numerous actions. For example, youth councils in many countries launched awareness-raising campaigns, and many young people also showed interest in volunteering and solidarity (e.g. by offering support to neighbours). At the same time, many fear-related problems emerged due to limited access to education, unfavourable family situations and lack of parental support, etc. Civil disobedience also became a common pattern, directed against the – in the eyes of many – unjustified expansion of closure measures imposed by the states, which had a particularly negative impact on the possibility of exercising basic civil liberties (freedom of expression, association and assembly). The impact of the lockdown measures on the youth sector was identified along the following dimensions: 1. direct impact of the lockdown on operations (suspension of activities); 2. financial impact (difficult planning for the future due to the suspension of calls for youth work funding in many countries and other funding cuts); 3. pressure to find alternatives (digitalisation of youth work together with the associated challenges – lack of digital skills and resources); 4. implementation of new activities (shift from face-to-face activities to online activities). The three main responses of the youth sector therefore included shifting from offline to online activities, increasing the provision of relevant information to young people through the online tools and increasing the provision of health-related support services to young people (O'Donovan and Zentner 2020).

In 2020, the Youth Partnership also conducted a survey *Effects of Covid-19 across youth work and youth activities*, which explored the impact of Covid-19 on youth work and youth activities. A questionnaire distributed to relevant networks across Europe showed that the pandemic has had a profound impact on the lives of young people and the youth sector. In particular, the impact on activities indicates that most youth organisations had to cancel their 2020-21 programmes due to lack of funding and/or difficulties in keeping organisations

motivated. Most international youth organisations also had to cancel mobility activities and volunteer programmes. Measures taken to continue activities included exploring online tools in different ways. The impact on funding also varied. Almost two thirds of the organisations experienced delays in responding to their pending or already submitted grant applications, and more than a third of them experienced budget cuts. During the pandemic, most grants were delayed, many organisations running various programmes were unable to raise the fees, online activities were not funded to the same extent as offline activities, and tenders for local projects were either cancelled or postponed. In some cases, online activities created additional costs for the organisations, as not all of them had sufficient infrastructure, equipment and capacity to offer such activities before. The survey also found that over 80% of youth organisations received no support from local, regional or national authorities during the pandemic and over 90% of organisations received no support from international institutions (EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership 2020).

The RAY network¹ also conceived a *Research project on the impact of the Corona pandemic on youth work in Europe (RAY-COR)*. The main finding was that Covid-19 had a profound impact on youth work and youth workers, that access to youth activities or projects was greatly affected, and that youth work spaces, youth work methods and youth work tools changed greatly. Yet, it is also found that youth work (during the pandemic) gave young people something meaningful to do and something to look forward to. The study has also shown that most organisations have experienced delays and major disruptions in their work, that their work now revolves mainly around Covid-19, and that organisations are now striving to transfer important parts of their work to online environments (Research-based analysis of European youth programmes 2020).

In 2020, the European Commission conducted a *Survey on the impact of COVID-19 on learning mobility activities*. The aim of the survey was to collect the views of participants in Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps mobility programmes (ESC) on how the pandemic affected activities under the programmes. Participants in learning mobility programmes reported that a large proportion of their project activities continued in a different way than planned (online

¹ The RAY network is a research network whose main task is to conduct research-based analysis and monitoring of European youth programmes. The focus of the network is to provide evidence-based understanding of processes and outcomes in youth work and non-formal education. The network consists of partners from 32 European countries.

or distance learning), that the activities they were participating in were temporarily suspended and that the cancellation of learning mobilities was quite common. Even if virtual activities were positively evaluated, respondents reported serious lack of face-to-face interaction. The *Study on Youth Work in the EU*, also commissioned by the European Commission (2021), found that youth workers across the EU need more sustainable and operational resources and that recognition of youth work needs to be improved, especially in terms of developing ways to recognise non-formal education and learning acquired in youth work, as well as society's recognition of the value of youth work. The need for digital youth work was also clearly identified by Covid-19, even though it existed before. The need for further resources to offset additional costs or make up for budget shortfalls was particularly evident for non-public youth work organisations and for organisations in countries with practice architectures in need of development. The study also showed that Covid-19 highlighted the need for better access to digital infrastructure and materials, as well as the need to maintain connections through networks of youth workers, to share ideas about moving to a digital offer or to receive further training, and the need to provide additional support to youth workers dealing with vulnerable populations. The study found that national policy priorities do not meet the needs of youth workers, that concrete support and assistance services for youth workers are inadequate, that in addition to a lack of funding, there is a lack of support for appropriate employment conditions for youth workers, and that country actions taken as a result of Covid-19 often have a negative impact on youth work. Nevertheless, the youth sector showed itself to be innovative during Covid-19 and no serious concerns were expressed, although the disruption caused by the pandemic forced youth workers to quickly innovate and move activities online or develop other activities.

4. Data and method

To explore the impact of Covid-19 on youth participation and civic space for youth, this study adopted and revised a framework from the Transparency and Accountability Initiative framework on improving the measurement of civic space (see Malena, 2015). This framework aims to support and advocate for the protection and enablement of civic space. It seeks to measure civic space against a set of core principles that build on a traditional triad of civic space (freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly), while allowing for detailed and country-specific accounts (Malena 2015: 7). In line with this framework, we have focused particularly on examining the three dimensions: a) citizen

participation; b) freedoms of information and expression; and c) rights of assembly and association.

In the context of citizen participation, the study examined the ability to advocate for others freely and without fear of retribution; the ability to participate in processes of deliberation and decision-making processes on important issues (e.g. through public consultations, joint committees, participatory planning or policy-making processes, etc.), the ability to influence the outcome of decisions), the ability to influence the outcome of policy deliberation and decision-making processes; the extent to which public authorities control youth organisations, the frequency of invitations from public authorities to participate in finding solutions to the problems in the field of activity concerned, the extent to which public authorities are willing to co-operate with youth organisations, and the extent to which public authorities are willing to recognise the opinion of youth organisations. Freedoms of information and expression were examined in terms of the ability to access information (including financial information) from state sources, the ability to express opinions freely in public without fear of retribution, and the ability to use the internet freely (both for access to information and for communication). For the rights of assembly and association, the paper looked at the ability to organise/participate in public meetings or demonstrations without fear of reprisals, the ability to operate independently and free from state interference, support from the authorities, the imposition of restrictions by the authorities, barriers to accessing foreign funding (e.g. EU, funding from other international organisations, foundations), and the degree of assessment by “market” indicators (e.g. the amount of private funding raised, basic quantitative indicators, etc.). A more detailed description of the variables can be found in the research tool in the Annex.

We have oriented ourselves towards the most important actors that secure civic spaces and youth participation – organisations that are active in the youth field. They are the focus of this study because they advocate for and represent youth interests as well as providing services that are best suited to youth needs. In addition to their civic and political socialisation function, these organisations serve as true laboratories of democracy and democratic innovation, demonstrating new repertoires of political action and coming closest to the

diverse political imaginations and citizenship of youth. As such, these organisations are one of the best mechanisms to identify the impact of Covid-19 on youth participation and civic space. In our purposive sampling process, we captured the most politically and socially relevant youth organisations, regardless of their legal form, by examining the membership of the main European and national youth umbrella organisations and supplementing this list with the relevant youth organisations from the European Commission's Youth Wiki tool. Accompanying this strategy, the Youth Partnership networks were used to disseminate the invitation through these channels as well. Organisations were contacted through their official emails, with clear instructions on which person or group of people should fill in the web-based questionnaire. We sent out two rounds of invitations in December 2021 and received 109 valid responses.

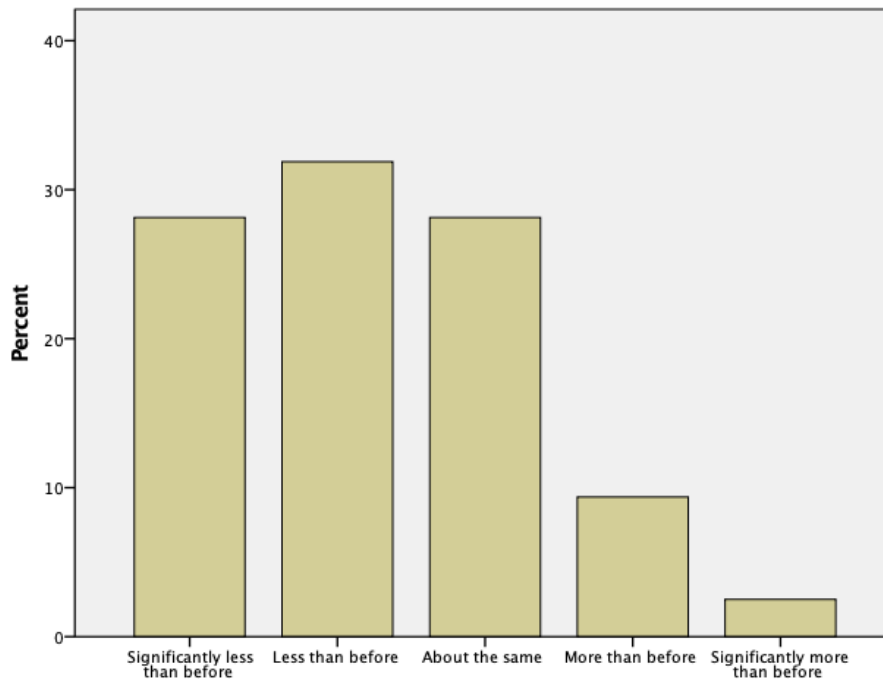
5. Survey results

The results of the survey conducted among organisations in the youth field are presented in line with the general examination of the three key dimensions of the instrument itself: Citizen Participation; Freedoms of Information and Expression; and the Right of Assembly and Association.

5.1. Strategies for accessing and engaging young people

The study begins by examining the impact of Covid-19 on young people's involvement in the activities of the organisations surveyed. The results are very clear, showing that around 60% of organisations reported a decrease in the engagement of young people in their activities, with 28% of organisations reporting significantly lower levels. In general, organisations also indicated a decrease in engagement of all target groups of young people they deal with. However, many of them also indicated target groups related to systems and programmes that have been replaced or closed down, or whose operations have moved to online environments (e.g. volunteering and mobility programmes, pupils and students).

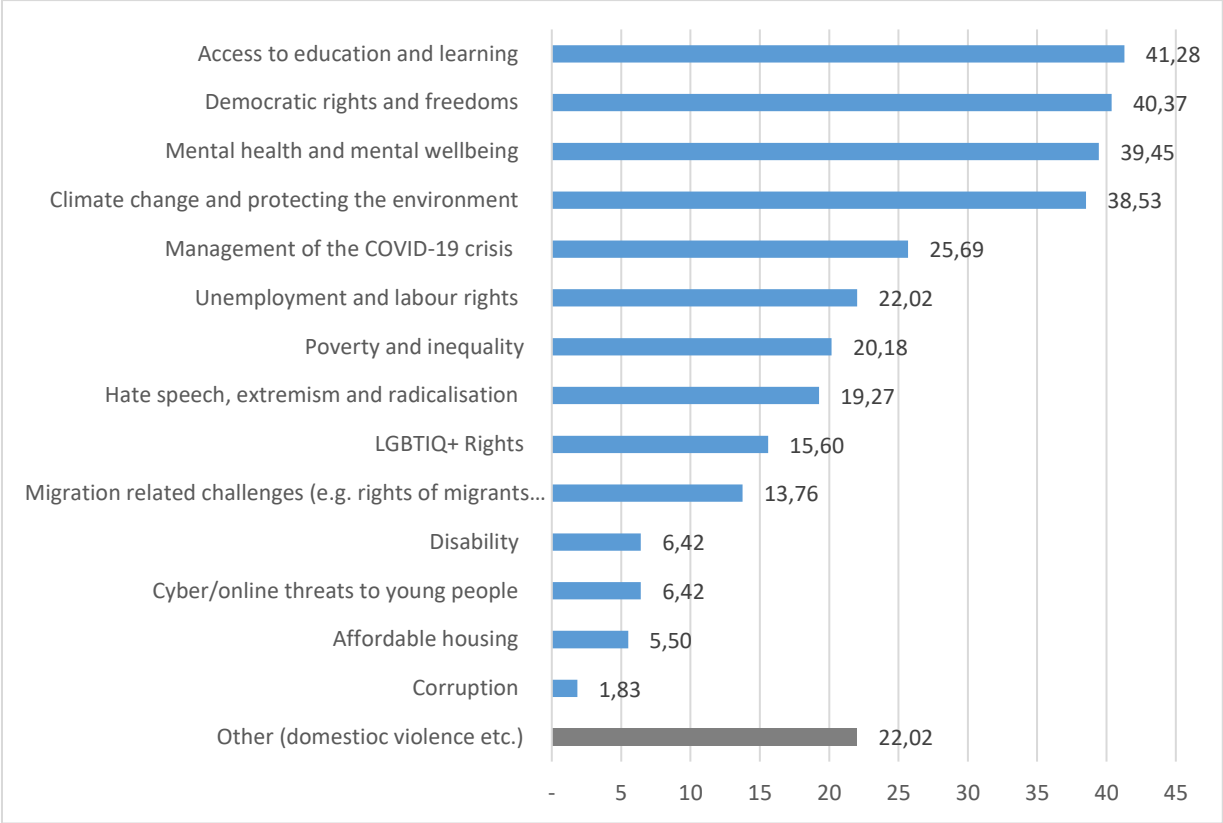
Figure 1: Compared to the times before the outbreak of Covid-19, to what extent have young people been involved in your organisation’s activities?



When it comes to the issues on which the organisations have organised activities, we can clearly see those that are addressed by many organisations. About 40% of the organisations have addressed the issue of access to education and learning, which has also proved to be extremely important because of Covid-19. Similarly linked to Covid-19 is the issue of the authorities’ dismantling of democratic rights and freedoms, which at first seemed justified but over a period of time proved increasingly difficult to defend credibly, and here again organisations from the youth sector played an important role, demonstrating the importance of young people’s access to these rights and freedoms. Another characteristic theme of Covid-19 is the challenges to young people’s mental health and well-being, which were also highly recognised and addressed by the organisations interviewed. A theme that emerged directly from Covid-19 and proved highly relevant to the organisations interviewed, as a quarter of them addressed it, was also the crisis management of Covid-19, as they rightly recognised its importance for young people’s access to various rights and services, as well as for the recovery phase. Of the issues indirectly related to the Covid-19 pandemic, organisations most frequently addressed **climate change and environmental protection (38%), unemployment**

and labour rights (22%), poverty and inequality (20%), and hate speech, extremism and radicalisation (19%).

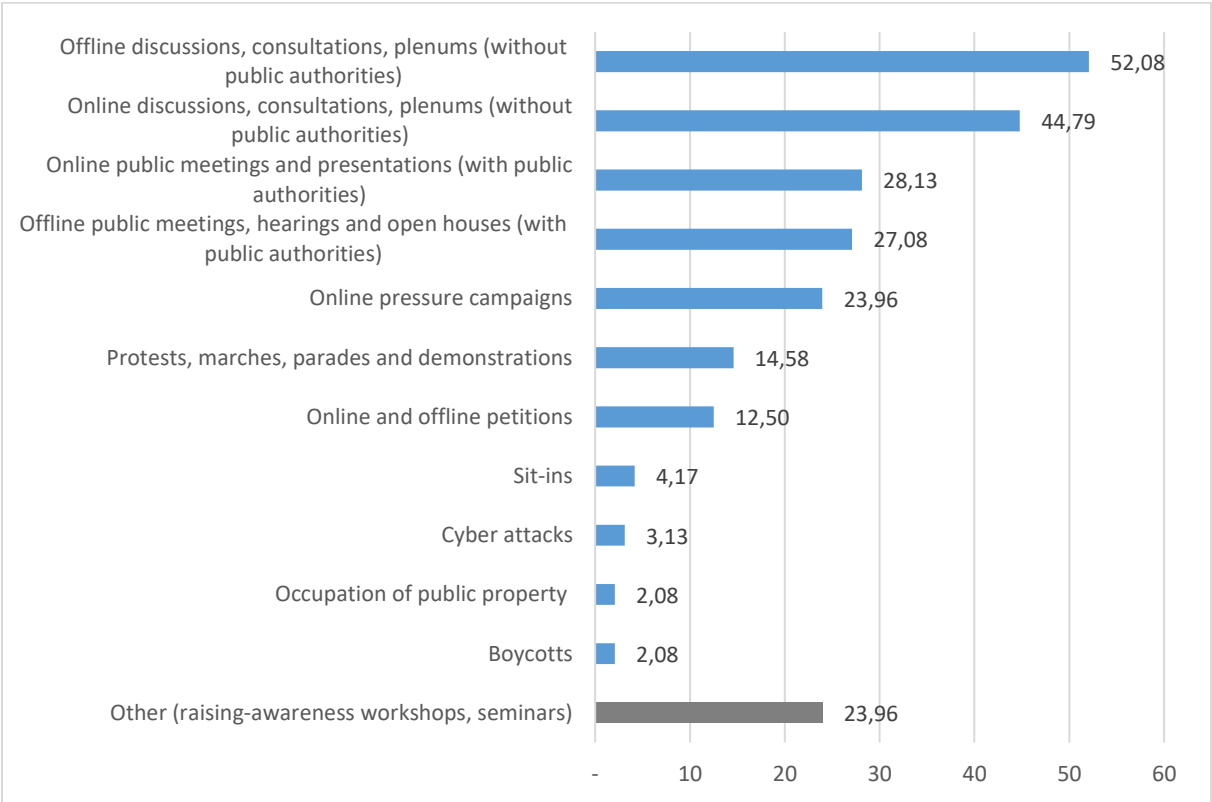
Figure 2: What are the issues that your organisation has organised activities around that have attracted most engagement by young people?



The types of activities undertaken by organisations that have attracted the most engagement from young people vary. Non-institutional political and social activities predominated. Offline discussions, consultations and plenums without the involvement of authorities proved to be the most attractive (more than half of the organisations surveyed chose this option), clearly indicating the attractiveness of non-institutional and non-hierarchical onsite civic engagement of young people. This form was even more attractive than the online version of the same type of engagement (45% of organisations), which also points to the attractiveness and need for direct human contact. Significantly less attractive, but still quite common, are online and offline public meetings, presentations, hearings and open days at public authorities. Each form of engagement in institutional politics (online and offline) was indicated by almost a third of the organisations, which also suggests that organisations from the youth sector are an

important link between young people and key political institutions. Other important forms of engagement that appealed to young people were online pressure campaigns, selected by 24% of organisations, and protests, marches, parades and demonstrations with 12%.

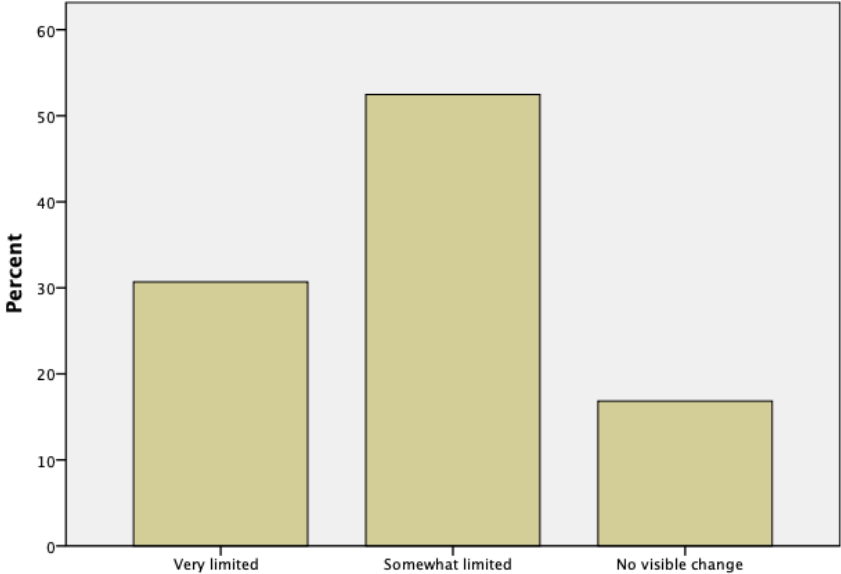
Figure 3: What type of activities that your organisation has organised have attracted most engagement by young people?



Organisations generally state that their access to young people has been reduced by Covid-19, as only 17% of them do not notice any visible change. To be precise, 31% of them indicate that their access to young people was very limited and another 52% of the organisations indicate that their access was somewhat limited. The main barriers that restricted organisations’ access to young people were social distancing measures that severely limited or completely prevented direct face-to-face contact, the reduction or even suspension of many activities and programmes (e.g. Volunteering), the closure of institutional facilities that served as access points for organisations and other lockdown measures that physically prevented organisations from getting to young people and vice versa, and challenges related to access to online environments and online fatigue (e.g. Zoom) of those who did manage to

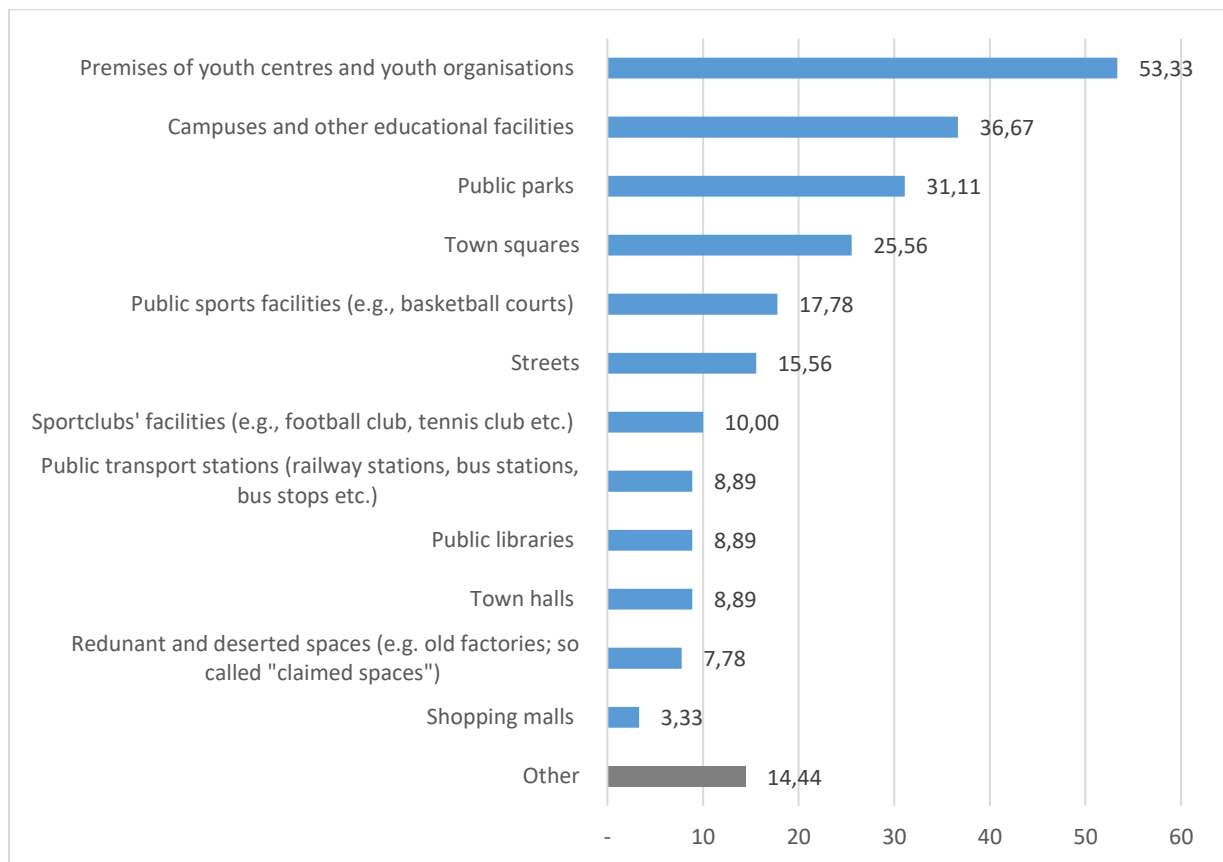
gain access. About a third of organisations reported limited access of young people to the internet and digital devices (both for access to information and communication), with about 10% of organisations encountering severe limitations in their attempts to engage young people in their activities (see Figure 1 in the Annex).

Figure 4: Has your organisation’s access to young people been restricted because of Covid-19?



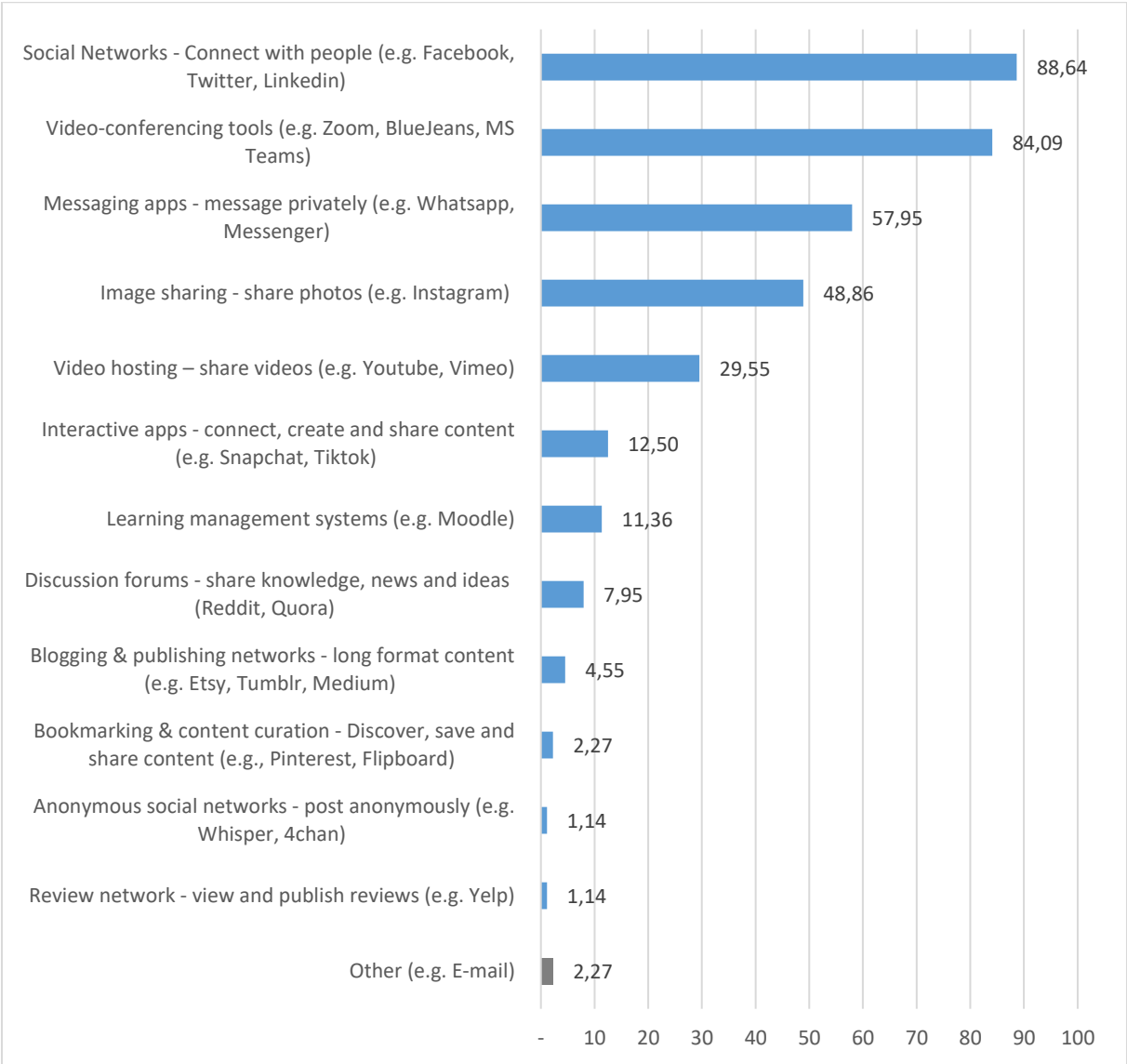
The types of offline space that proved most valuable to organisations in their efforts to engage young people were not surprising and represented the key areas where youth work is practised. 53% of organisations cited youth centre and youth organisation spaces. This is followed by campuses and formal educational environments (37%), which are a gateway to young people for many organisations, and basically areas where organisations provide their own engagement opportunities for young people. General public spaces such as public parks (31%) and city squares (26%) as well as public sports facilities (18%) and streets (16%) were also found to be very popular and effective.

Figure 5: What kind of physical (offline) spaces have proven most valuable to your organisation in securing youth engagement since the outbreak of Covid-19?



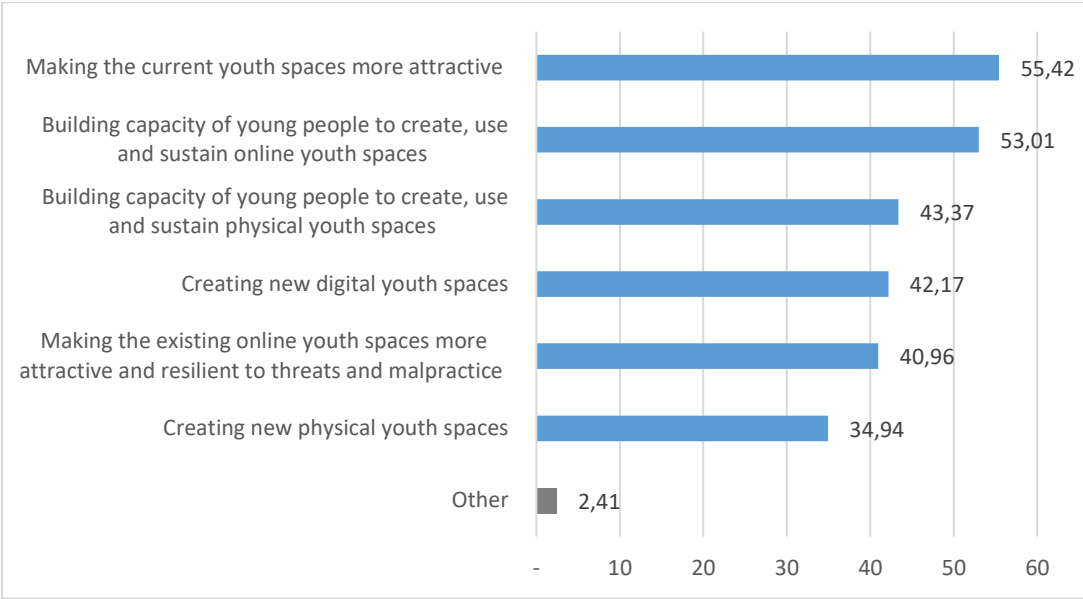
When we examine the online spaces that have proved most valuable to organisations in securing youth engagement during the Covid-19 pandemic, it is clear that social networks, with Facebook at the forefront, are the most effective tools. Nine out of 10 organisations said that these tools were very effective. At the same time – and paralleling the experience of formal education systems and the world of work – video conferencing tools were found to be almost as effective as social networks, with 84% of organisations choosing them as effective digital environments for engaging young people. Popular environments also include private messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Messenger (58%), image-sharing tools such as Instagram (49%) and video-hosting tools such as YouTube and Vimeo (30%).

Figure 6: What kind of digital (online) spaces have proved most valuable to your organisation in securing youth engagement since the outbreak of COVID-19?



Based on the experience gained during the Covid-19 pandemic, the organisations identify different strategies to ensure young people’s engagement in the post-pandemic period. It is clear that – even if different strategies prove relevant from their point of view – creating new spaces is not high on the list of priorities: 35% of organisations reported creating new offline spaces and 42% new online spaces. Rather, it is clear that organisations believe that offline youth spaces should be improved to become more attractive (55%) and that young people’s capacities need to be built to enable them to competently create, use and sustain both online and offline youth spaces (53%).

Figure 7: What strategies related to youth spaces will your organisation pursue most to ensure youth engagement in the post-pandemic period?



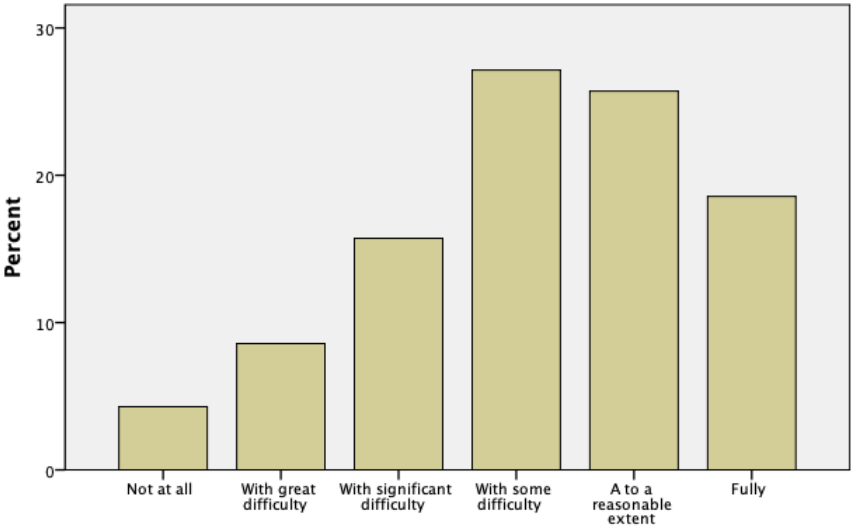
5.2. Citizen participation

When we examined the extent to which organisations are able to participate in the public deliberation and decision-making processes on issues that are important to them, Covid-19 proved to be a great challenge. Less than a fifth of the organisations surveyed were able to participate fully, while almost 30% of them had at least significant difficulties. The reasons for not being able to participate fully are due to an exclusive dialogue between the authorities and some stakeholders, as well as limited consultations conducted through online tools with no or almost no two-way interaction. The organisations also point out that their opinions were not sought, but rather their volunteer skills and ability to deliver services were of interest to the authorities. If we compare these results with the pre-Covid-19 period studied by Deželan et al. (2020: 31) using the same methodology, it is clear that despite the fact that the civic space for the youth sector has shrunk in the past, the Covid-19 crisis has significantly worsened the situation. The biggest change can be seen in the fact that the number of organisations able to fully participate (previously 38%) and the number of organisations having at least significant difficulties (previously 11%) have significantly decreased.

When asked about their ability to engage freely and without fear of retribution, more than 10% of organisations felt completely unable to engage in advocacy, while another 15%

experienced significant difficulties. Less than 30% of organisations were able to engage fully without fear of retribution (see Figure 2 in the Annex). Restrictive measures included police control, physical violence, especially against members of sexual and ethnic minorities, and others. Compared to before the pandemic, the difference in results is again alarming. Before the pandemic, 61% of organisations said they were fully able to engage in advocacy, while less than 2% of organisations said they were not able to engage at all (see Deželan et al. 2020: 38).

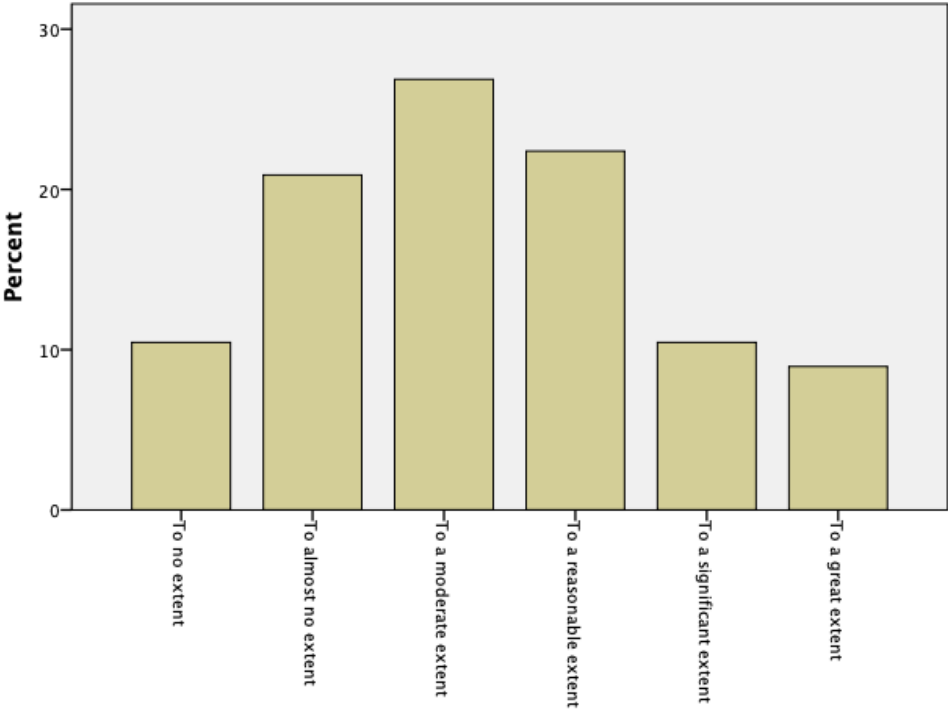
Figure 8: *Thinking about the time since the outbreak of Covid-19, to what extent have your organisation and its members been able to participate in processes of deliberation and decision-making processes on issues that are important to you (e.g. through public consultations, joint committees, participatory planning or policy-making processes, etc.)?*



As a result, the perception of organisations in terms of their ability to influence the outcomes of policy deliberations and decision-making processes is low. To be precise, less than 10% of the organisations believe that they have been able to influence the outcomes to a great extent, while more than one third of them are convinced that they have been able to influence the outcomes to almost no or no extent. The organisations see the reasons for the limited influence mainly in the limited access to decision makers as well as in the systematic disregard for organisations from the youth sector and civil society in general. The unwillingness of policy makers to acknowledge the opinion of youth organisations is also attributed to their low political relevance, the small numerical strength of young people and the fact that they are

not attractive to the mass media. Although the numbers in the pre-pandemic period were also not promising, a much smaller proportion (17%) of organisations reported having virtually no influence on the outcome of policy deliberations (Deželan et al. 2020: 37).

Figure 9: Thinking about the time since the outbreak of Covid-19, to what extent have your organisation and its members been able to influence the outcome of the political deliberation and decision-making processes?



If we look at the different levels of authorities and their propensity to seek the opinion of organisations, there is not much difference between them. It is noteworthy that national authorities seek the opinion of organisations more often than local or European ones (see Figure 3 in the Annex). This pattern more or less mirrors the results obtained by Deželan et al. (2020: 33-35) for the pre-pandemic period. However, the only clear difference between the two measurements is the fact that the responsiveness of national authorities has decreased significantly, as before Covid-19, more than 43% of organisations reported that they are frequently asked by authorities to participate in finding solutions.

It is clear that authorities encourage organisations to express their views for many reasons, but these reasons are not always genuine. The gap between the encouragement to express

an opinion and the recognition of that opinion in the actual outcomes of the policy process is a clear indication of this. If we look at the extent to which organisations are encouraged to express their opinions, 58% of organisations are encouraged to express their opinions at least irregularly, with 15% of organisations stating that their opinions are always sought. On the other hand, less than 2% of organisations state that their opinion is always taken into account and another 34% of organisations state that their opinion is often taken into account when they express their opinion. On the other hand, two thirds of the organisations state that their opinion is rarely or never taken into account (see Figure 4 in the Annex).

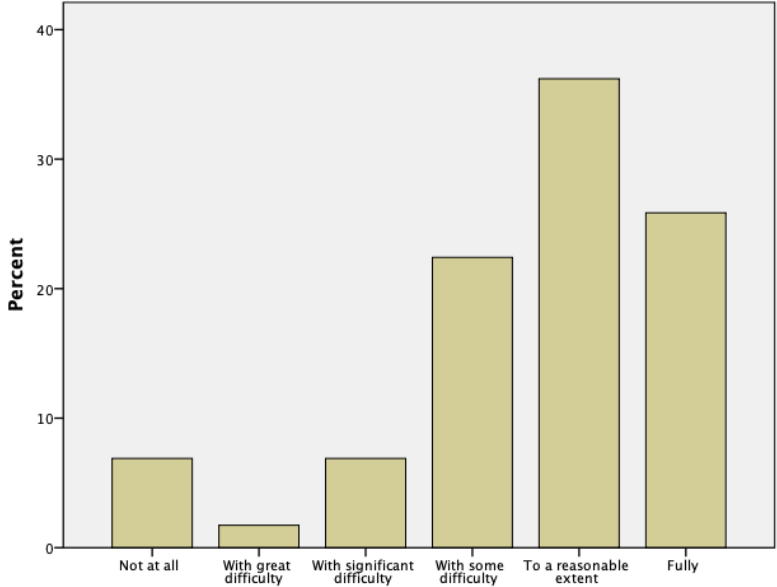
5.3. Access to information

Access to information from government sources is one of the prerequisites for a functioning civic space and governments are usually not willing to provide all the information that watchdogs and other organisations ask for. This is also the case for the youth sector organisations surveyed, with **only 26% of organisations reporting that they have full access to information from government sources, including financial information**. In contrast, more than 15% of organisations experienced significant difficulties or were unable to access information from government sources, and a further 22% of organisations experienced some difficulties. The situation described reflects the conditions under which the organisations operated before the pandemic, with one important difference. The absolute inability to access information from government sources was reported by slightly more than 1% of the organisations surveyed at the time (see Deželan et al. 2020: 25).

The inability to access information has many faces. One is the complete ignorance of governments and their organs towards organisations' requests for certain information. Another is the complexity of information sources (e.g. websites) and the lack of clarity of the information received when no additional support or assistance is provided to adequately reconstruct or fully understand the information gathered. The scattering of information across different information sources is also a strategy used by governments to make access to information more difficult for those who request it. A practice also commonly used in this sense by governments is the late publication of important information that includes tender deadlines etc., as well as the selective publication of this information (e.g. without deadlines).

However, Covid-19 has introduced an additional barrier to access to information that entails no intention of concealing information. For example, many government employees were forced to work from home and had limited access to information requested by organisations, or even had their jobs suspended for the period of the blocks. Since access to various information is highly regulated and permissions are carefully granted, many government employees actually did not have the opportunity to access information requested by various organisations and individuals.

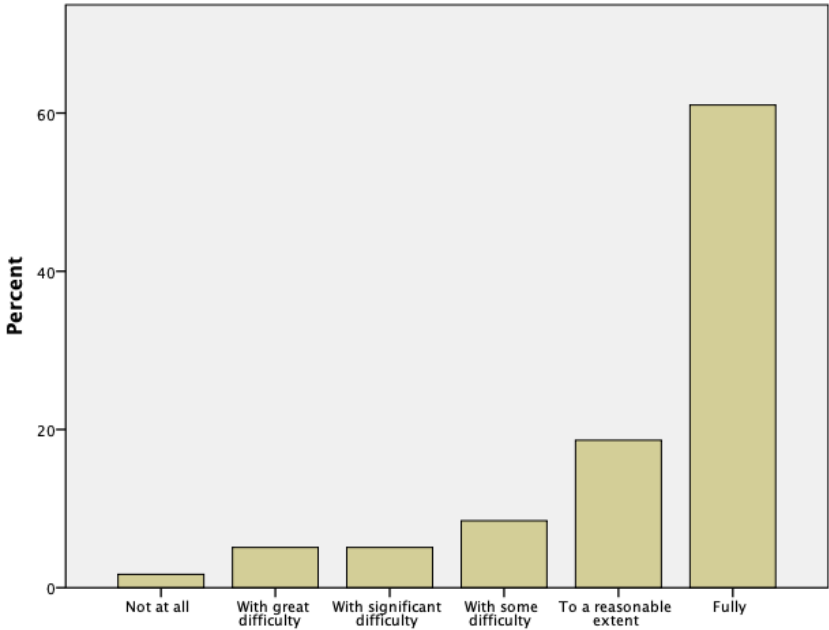
Figure 10: Thinking about the period since the outbreak of Covid-19, to what extent has your organisation been able to obtain the information you require (including financial information) from government sources?



Freedom of expression is one of the most important dimensions of civic space and a basic requirement for all democratic societies. The Covid-19 crisis has shown that governments are tempted to restrict this freedom in order to silence criticism of their actions. The general management of the Covid-19 crisis and the measures taken, especially social distancing, provided an opportunity for this. Although the vast majority of organisations were able to speak out freely and without fear of retribution (61%), there were also organisations that felt unable to do so. More than a tenth (12%) of organisations experienced significant difficulties or even an inability to express their views without fear of a backlash from the government. These fears originate from smear campaigns by politicians and political parties, threats to interfere in competitive funding procedures, verbal attacks, termination of funding for

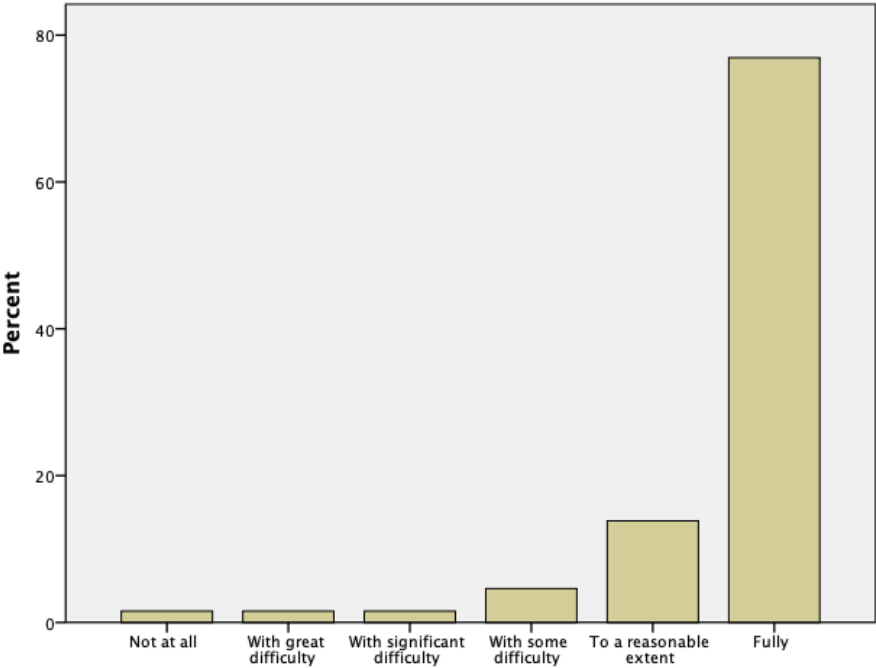
projects and programmes, etc. These results do not show much difference compared to the pre-pandemic period, when a smaller proportion of organisations reported full expressive capacity (see Deželan et al. 2020: 26).

Figure 11: When you think about the time since the outbreak of Covid-19, to what extent has your organisation been able to express itself freely in public without fear of retribution?



Free use of the internet, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, was one of the prerequisites for accessing information, reaching out to and connecting with young people, and conducting various advocacy activities. However, the internet is still not fully accessible to some organisations and individuals. Organisations reported that more than 23% of them were not able to fully access the internet. Nearly one in 10 had at least some difficulty, and one in 20 had at least significant difficulty accessing the internet. These obstacles were experienced primarily due to poor system-level infrastructure and basic equipment of organisations and their service recipients. The situation worsened significantly after the pandemic, as 90% of organisations reported being able to use the internet without restrictions before the pandemic (see Deželan et al. 2020: 2).

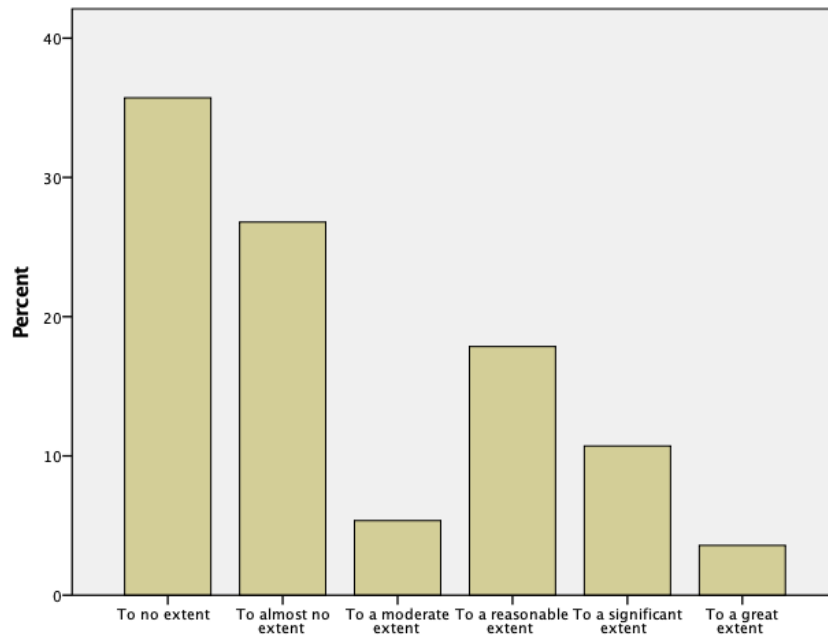
Figure 12: Thinking about the time since the outbreak of Covid-19, to what extent has your organisation and its staff been able to use the internet freely (both to access information and to communicate)?



5.4. Freedoms of association and assembly

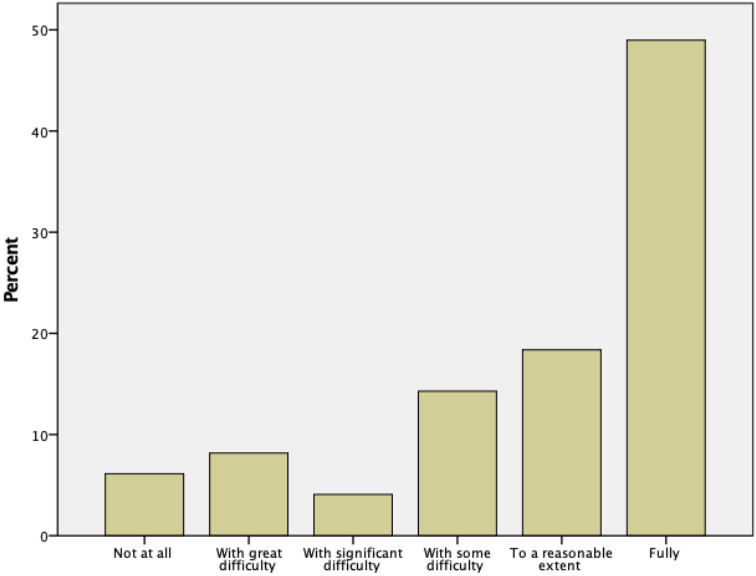
Freedoms of association and assembly – as the two remaining core freedoms of the civic space – were severely tested by the Covid-19 measures. Some of these seemed justified, at least for a period of time, but many citizens felt that governments were exploiting the situation to downplay criticism of their actions in managing the Covid-19 crisis. In some cases, it was also an opportunity to silence civil society organisations and individuals, or at least limit their ability to voice their concerns about some non-transparent practices that emerged as a result of Covid-19. The organisations believe that **governments have used the opportunity to suppress the ability to participate in public meetings and demonstrations**. More than a third of the organisations surveyed believe that the government has done this, with 15% of organisations believing that this has been done to a significant extent.

Figure 13: Thinking about the period since the outbreak of Covid-19, to what extent has the government unjustifiably restricted the ability of organisations and their supporters to participate in public assemblies and demonstrations?



The authorities can prevent organisations and individuals from organising or participating in public assemblies and demonstrations. This is done in a variety of ways. One of these is also retaliation, which can take many forms, some more direct (e.g. physical violence), others more subtle (e.g. imposing undue bureaucratic burdens). The surveyed organisations indicated that fear of reprisals affects their ability and willingness to participate in public assemblies and demonstrations. About one third of the organisations experienced at least some difficulties in participating in these activities, and more than 14% of the organisations experienced great difficulties, which in some cases even prevented them from participating in such activities. Compared to the pre-pandemic period, organisations experiencing obstacles to organising and/or participating in public assemblies and demonstrations have more than doubled (see Deželan et al. 2020: 28).

Figure 14: Thinking about the time since the outbreak of Covid-19, to what extent have your organisation and its members been able to organise and/or participate in public assemblies and demonstrations without fear of retribution?



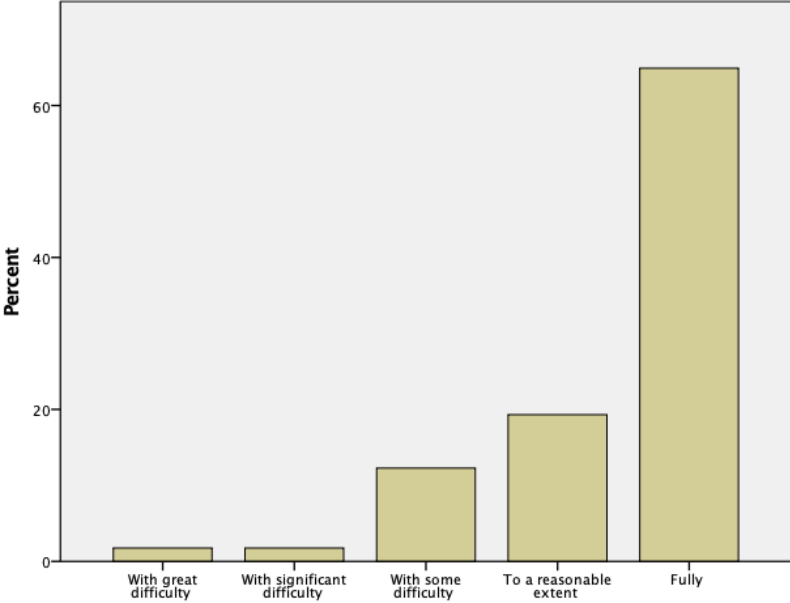
5.5. Ability to act autonomously

All in all, the different restrictions and the lack of support in difficult times clearly show the degree of autonomy of the organisations in fulfilling their organisational tasks, which in our case are to advocate for the interests of young people, to make their voices heard and to provide them with services. When asked about the extent to which governments interfere in the work of organisations in the youth field, it becomes apparent that the latter do not operate without government interference. **More than one third of the organisations report government interference, while 4% of the organisations report significant interference.** This interference manifested itself in a set of strict Covid-19-related rules and restrictions on access to funding.

We could also argue that the lack of support in a crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic could be seen as an element of interference, as youth-serving organisations have suffered immensely in terms of both infrastructure and financial and human resources (e.g. high proportion of volunteers, low level of professionalisation). **More than a third of the organisations report that they did not receive any support during the Covid-19 pandemic.** On the other hand, those reporting adequate or full support indicate that they received mainly

financial support (62%) and some provision of offices and workspace (30%), while one fifth of organisations were offered additional human resources or equipment (see Figure 5 in the Annex).

Figure 15: When you think about the time since the outbreak of Covid-19, to what extent has your organisation been able to work independently and free of government interference?

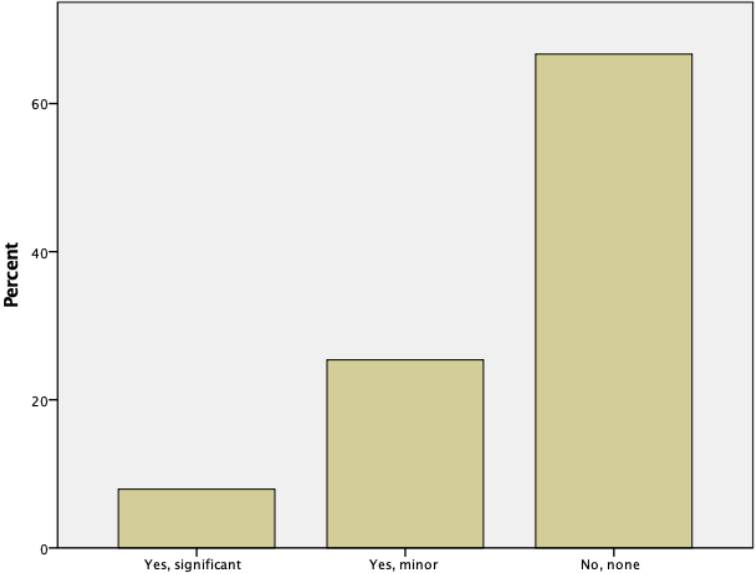


To limit the criticism and control capabilities of civil society organisations, governments use various other strategies. Imposing unreasonable restrictions is a common strategy. Again, about a third of organisations responded that they had experienced some or significant undue restrictions. One in ten organisations reported significant undue restrictions. These ranged from the aforementioned overuse of Covid-19 regulation related to social distancing and restrictions on opening hours, crowd size, etc., to unequal treatment of CSOs compared to commercial areas (e.g. shops, bars), to organisations being ignored when they tried to make contact or request any kind of service (see Figure 6 in the Annex).

A more explicit tactic is **making it more difficult to access foreign funding and consequently portraying organisations as foreign agents**. This tactic primarily affects the functioning of organisations due to the lack of funding and attempts to damage an organisation’s reputation by portraying it as a “traitor” acting in the interests of a foreign and malevolent power. The organisations surveyed report obstacles in accessing foreign funding to a considerable extent, as one third of them have experienced problems in this regard. Almost 8% of the organisations

even report significant obstacles imposed by governments. These obstacles consist of direct government control of the funds received, official declaration of being a foreign agent when receiving foreign funds, lack of support in building capacity to apply for and manage foreign funds and to prove co-financing, lack of transparency in decentralised distribution of EU funds, and lack of capacity building exercises to improve the ability to access foreign funds.

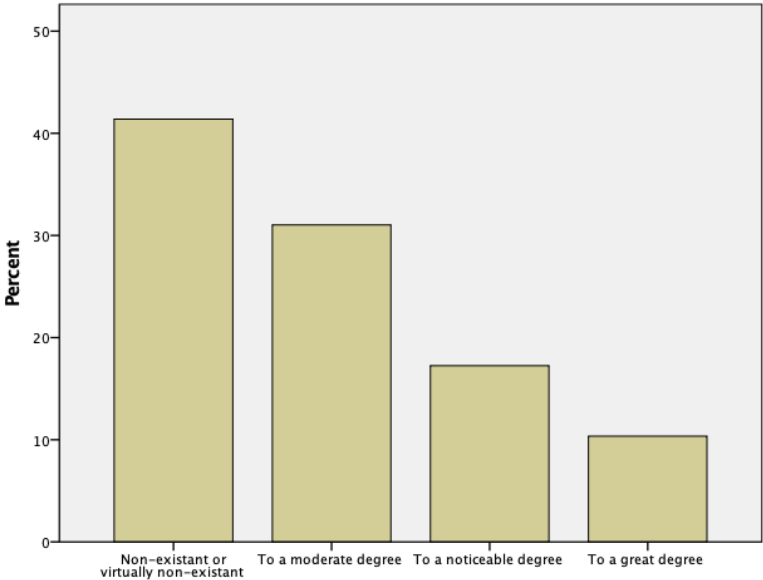
Figure 16: *Are there obstacles for your organisation or other youth organisations in your country to access foreign funding (e.g. EU, funding from other international organisations, foundations)?*



Various national as well as European and international programmes and funding opportunities rely heavily on numerous quantitative criteria and indicators. Either for reasons of reducing bureaucracy or malicious intent, excessive use is therefore made of quantitative performance indicators, which are sometimes the only measure of success and quality. As a result, larger and more professional organisations have a better chance of receiving funds, as various project management, quality assurance, audit and evaluation procedures can only be carried out by properly equipped professionals. Organisations in the youth sector, and primarily youth organisations, are most affected by this trend, as these organisations tend to be more in flux and have many volunteers and young people who are passionate about the organisation’s mission and do not have the appropriate training for such tasks usually performed by trained professionals. The organisations interviewed point to the existence of this problem, as 28% of

them say that they use market indicators to a significant extent. These indicators range from number of participants, income diversity, size of the organisation, staffing, self-funding level, outreach capacity, etc. As a result, organisations report that their work and qualitative changes are not appreciated. They therefore either try to find alternative sources of funding (e.g. private funding) or simply give up the idea of receiving funding for their activities. It appears that Covid-19 has not had much impact on this problem, which has already severely constrained organisations in fulfilling their missions in the past (see Deželan et al. 2020: 30).

Figure 17: *To what extent are youth organisations assessed against “market” indicators when applying for public funding or evaluating activities carried out (e.g. amount of private funding raised; basic quantitative indicators, etc.)?*



6. Concluding remarks

This study shows that Covid-19 has had a negative impact on young people and organisations in the youth sector, affecting particularly youth spaces and young people’s ability to participate meaningfully. The pandemic caused serious problems in areas that were already heavily burdened by previous crises and other events. It also required organisations to reset their priorities, which suddenly became Covid-19-oriented or at least linked to it. The top priorities thus became the activities connected with overcoming the crises, access to education and learning, and mental health.

Youth organisations emphasised that all key dimensions of youth participation and spaces studied through the survey were severely affected, including accessing and engaging young people, citizen participation, access to information, freedoms of association and assembly, and ability to act autonomously. Organisations continued to advocate for the access to democratic rights and freedoms. The dominant forms of youth engagement through organisations remained online and offline consultations, plenaries and assemblies outside institutional politics. Engagement in activities linked to political institutions and processes was an important, albeit less frequent, form of youth engagement. Access to and overall importance of these activities also depended heavily on various measures imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly social distancing, lockdown and suspension of programmes and schools. Offline modalities of engagement tied to the premises of youth centres and youth organisations proved to be the most attractive way for young people to engage in activities of organisations. In addition to the high importance of other offline public spaces, social networks, video conferencing tools and direct messaging apps were very effective in securing young people's engagement, especially when offline engagement opportunities were not available.

When it comes to young people's and organisations' access to civic space (i.e. freedom of expression, association and assembly), the results show that access to information is a tangible problem for organisations, as more than one fifth of them reported serious difficulties in accessing information from public sources. Furthermore, promoting organisations' views, including how to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic, was not widespread and was even less likely to be considered. One in 10 organisations even report significant difficulties in expressing themselves, and the same proportion of organisations have problems accessing the internet. Youth organisations also faced obstacles in access to information and decision-making processes that were, in their opinion, beyond objective and justifiable reasons. Similarly, organisations report obstacles to public assemblies and demonstrations that go beyond public health reasons and often include threats of retaliation. Most commonly, this occurs through the withdrawal of much-needed support for organisations – particularly during the Covid-19 crisis – and the termination of existing programmes, barriers to foreign funding, and interference from governments and groups that support them.

In general, the data collected suggests that young people's political participation and civic engagement were constrained by the Covid-19 pandemic, and that youth-serving organisations faced barriers that made these activities more difficult than what could be justified by the public health situation. This significantly impacted on their ability to promote the interests of young people and their rights and freedoms. While the previous studies show that young people's access to public space was already shrinking, the pandemic has further encouraged this trend, biting away a considerable piece of civic space that young people so desperately need.

Shrinking youth civic space during the Covid-19 pandemic remains an important obstacle for youth organisations and young people. A holistic approach from different actors in the youth field can support youth organisations in securing more space for participation for young people:

- youth organisations should continue to map the trends and advocate for access to youth spaces and participation in the decision-making processes;
- youth policy should support the development and safeguarding of youth spaces and access to information and freedoms, in order to allow for meaningful and safe participation of young people;
- youth research should provide evidence through knowledge and data gathering on the shrinking space phenomenon at local, national and European levels.

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Annex 1: Results of the survey conducted on organisations of the youth field

Figure 1: Compared to the times before the COVID-19 outbreak, to what extent has the access to the internet and digital devices (to both access information and communicate) been limited for young people engaging in activities of your organisation?

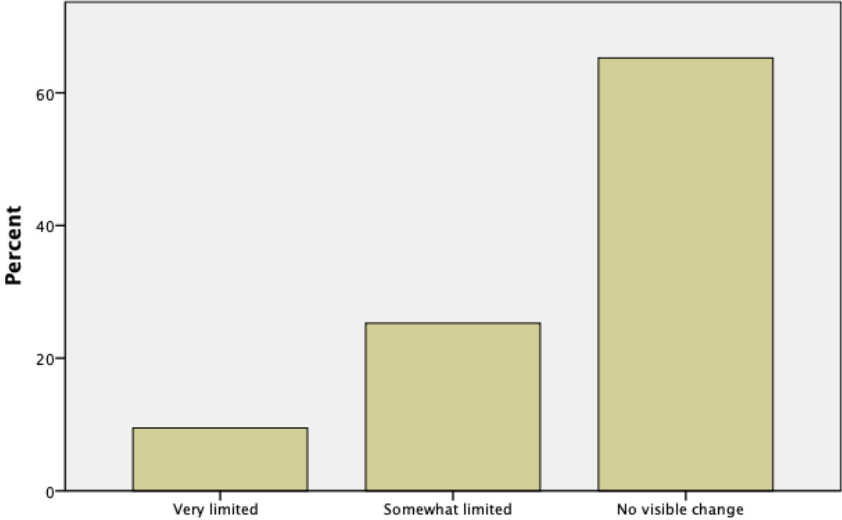


Figure 2: Thinking about the time since the outbreak of COVID-19, to what extent have your organisation and its members been able to engage in advocacy activities without fear of retribution?

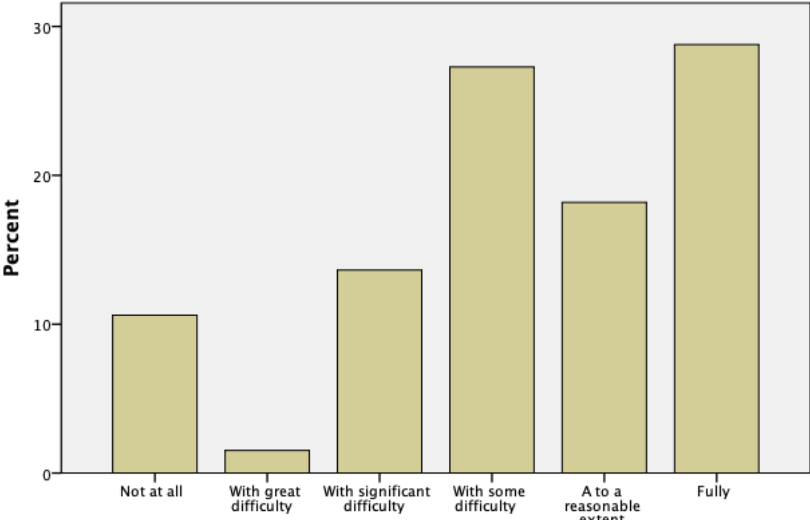


Figure 3: Thinking about the time since the outbreak of COVID-19, how often have you been asked by public authorities to participate in finding solutions to the problems relevant to your field of activity (consultations, etc.)?

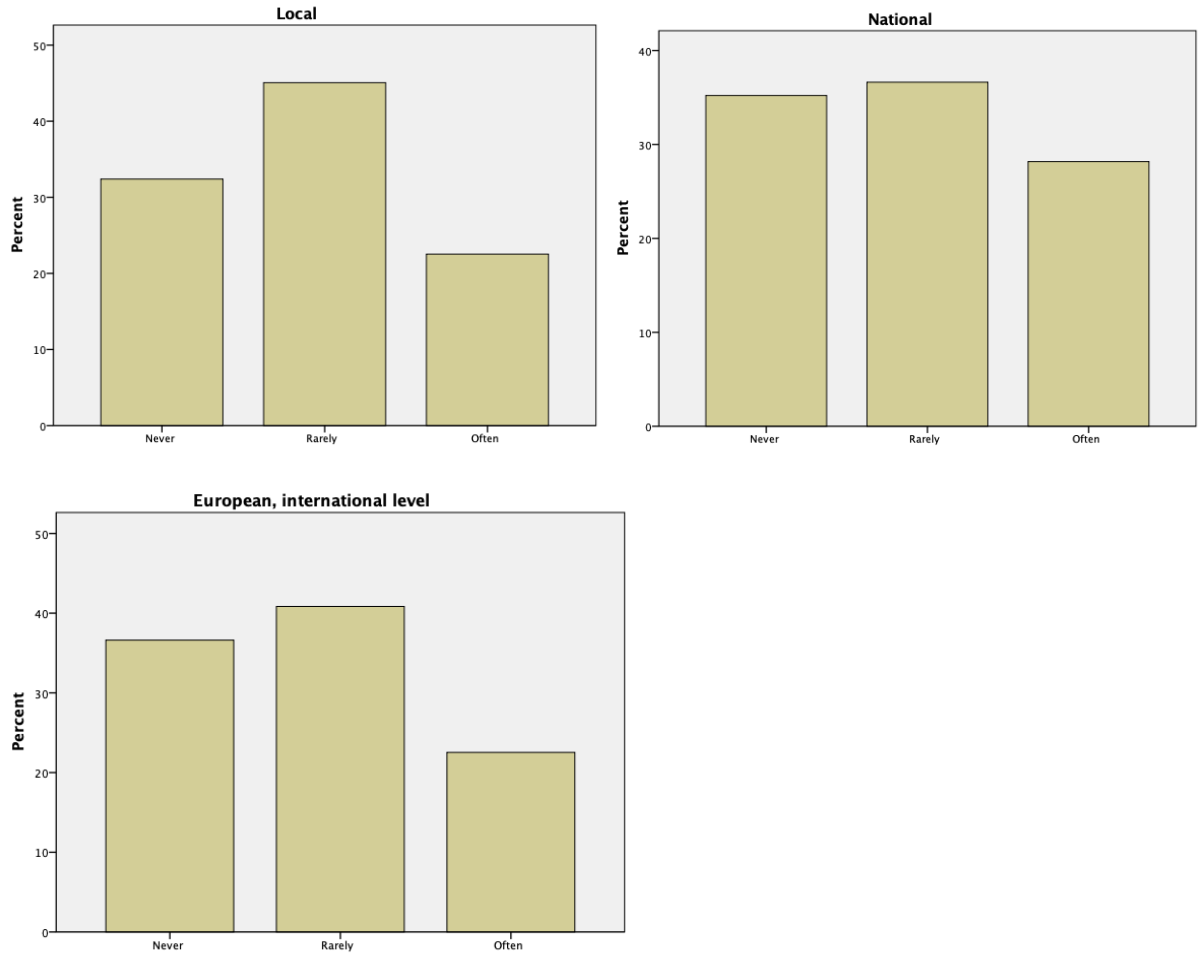


Figure 4: When you think about the time since the outbreak of COVID-19, how would you describe the co-operation of the youth organisations with the public authorities?

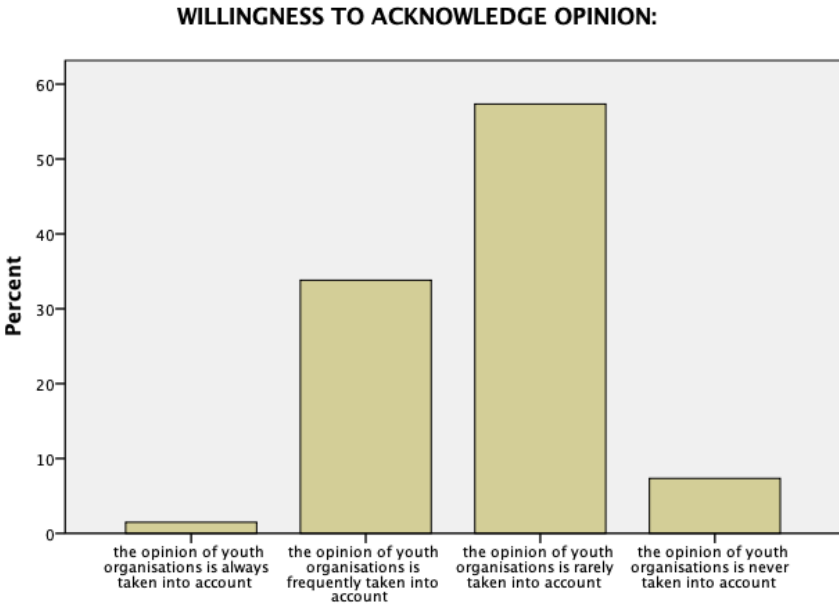
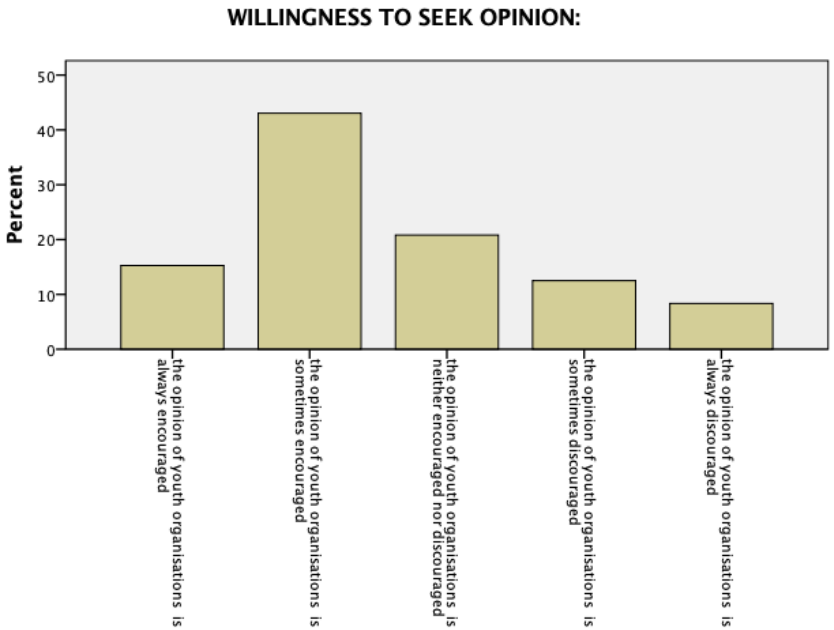


Figure 5: Thinking about the time since the outbreak of COVID-19, to what extent have the public authorities supported your organisation (e.g. through financial means, the possibility to use premises, etc.)?

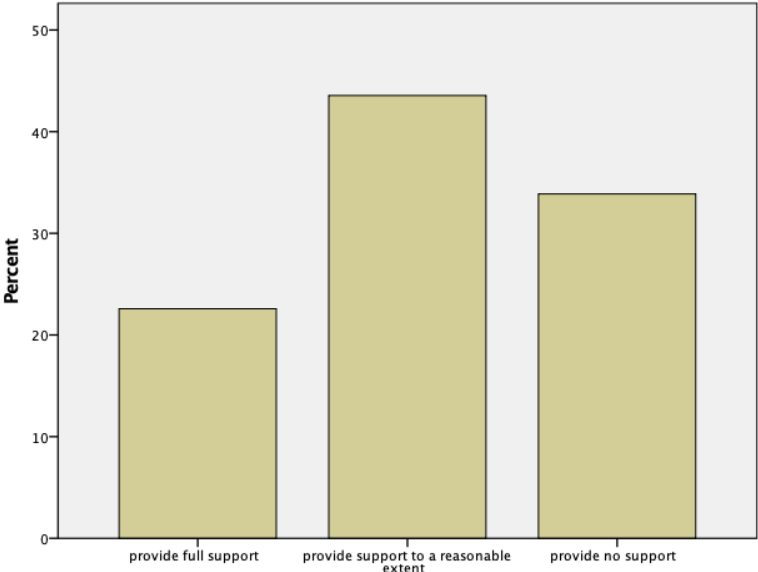
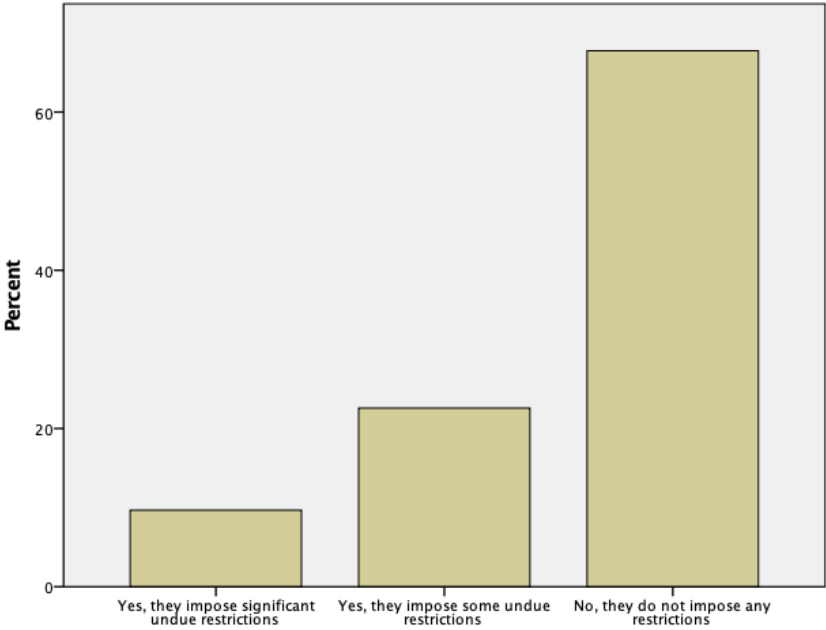


Figure 6: Thinking about the time since the outbreak of COVID-19, have the authorities imposed any restrictions on your organisation?



Annex 2: Survey questionnaire – “The impact of COVID-19 on youth participation and democratic spaces”

Q1 – DIMENSION 1: Youth participation

We are first interested in your organisational response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Q2 – Compared to the times before the COVID-19 outbreak, to what extent have young people been engaged in activities of your organisation?

- Significantly less than before
- Less than before
- About the same
- More than before
- Significantly more than before

(1) Q2 = [1, 2]

Q3 – What were the groups of young people, if any, that were engaged less than before?

(2) Q2 = [4, 5]

Q4 – What are the groups of young people, if any, that have been engaged more than before?

Q5 – What are the issues that your organisation has organised activities around that have attracted most engagement by young people?

Select up to five

- Democratic rights and freedoms
- Poverty and inequality
- Hate speech, extremism and radicalisation
- Affordable housing
- LGBTIQ+ Ri
- Disability
- Mental health and mental well-being
- Unemployment and labour rights
- Climate change and protecting the environment
- Cyber/online threats to young people
- Access to education and learning
- Migration-related challenges (e.g. rights of migrants and refugees)
- Corruption
- Management of a COVID-19 crisis
- Other:

Q6 – What type of activities that your organisation has organised have attracted most engagement by young people?

Select up to five

- Offline public meetings, hearings and open houses (with public authorities)
- Offline discussions, consultations, plenums (without public authorities)
- Online public meetings and presentations (with public authorities)
- Online discussions, consultations, plenums (without public authorities)
- Protests, marches, parades and demonstrations
- Online pressure campaigns
- Online and offline petitions

- Boycotts
- Cyber attacks
- Sit-ins
- Occupation of public property
- Other:

Q7 – Has access of your organisation to young people been limited as a result of COVID-19?

- Very limited
- Somewhat limited
- No visible change

(3) Q7 = [1, 2]

Q8 – In what way?

Q10 – Compared to the times before the COVID-19 outbreak, to what extent has access to the internet and digital devices (to both access information and communicate) been limited for young people engaging in activities of your organisation?

- Very limited
- Somewhat limited
- No visible change

Q11 – What type of physical (offline) spaces have proved to be of highest value for your organisation in securing engagement of young people since the outbreak of COVID-19?

Physical spaces

Select up to five

- Public parks
- Town squares
- Town halls
- Public libraries
- Streets
- Public sports facilities (e.g. basketball courts)
- Sports club facilities (e.g. football club, tennis club etc.)
- Premises of youth centres and youth organisations
- Shopping centres
- Public transport stations (railway stations, bus stations, bus stops etc.)
- Redundant and deserted spaces (e.g. old factories; so-called “claimed spaces”)
- Campuses and other educational facilities
- Other:

Q12 – What type of digital (online) spaces have proved to be of highest value for your organisation in securing engagement of young people since the outbreak of COVID-19?

Online spaces

Select up to five

- Social networks – connect with people (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn)
- Messaging apps – message privately (e.g. WhatsApp, Messenger)
- Image sharing – share photos (e.g. Instagram)
- Video hosting – share videos (e.g. YouTube, Vimeo)
- Blogging and publishing networks – long-format content (e.g. Etsy, Tumblr, Medium)
- Interactive apps – connect, create and share content (e.g. Snapchat, TikTok)
- Discussion forums – share knowledge, news and ideas (Reddit, Quora)
- Bookmarking and content curation – discover, save and share content (e.g. Pinterest, Flipboard)
- Review network – view and publish reviews (e.g. Yelp)
- Anonymous social networks – post anonymously (e.g. Whisper, 4chan)
- Video-conferencing tools (e.g. Zoom, BlueJeans, MS Teams)
- Learning management systems (e.g. Moodle)
- Other:

Q13 – What strategies related to youth spaces will your organisation pursue the most in order to assure engagement of young people in the (post-)pandemic period?

Multiple answers are possible

- Creating new physical youth spaces
- Making the current youth spaces more attractive
- Building capacity of young people to create, use and sustain physical youth spaces
- Creating new digital youth spaces
- Making the existing online youth spaces more attractive and resilient to threats and malpractice
- Building capacity of young people to create, use and sustain online youth spaces
- Other:

Q15 – When you think of the time since the outbreak of COVID-19, to what extent have your organisation and its members been able to freely engage in advocacy activities without fear of retribution?

- Not at all
- With great difficulty
- With significant difficulty
- With some difficulty
- A to a reasonable extent
- Fully
- Don't know/not applicable

(4) Q15 = [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

Q16 – In what way have your organisation and its members faced barriers to freely engage in advocacy activities?

Q17 – When you think of the time since the outbreak of COVID-19, to what extent have your organisation and its members been able to participate in processes of deliberation and decision-making on issues that are important to you (e.g. through public consultations, joint committees, processes of participatory planning or policy-making, etc.?)

- Not at all

- With great difficulty
- With significant difficulty
- With some difficulty
- A to a reasonable extent
- Fully
- Don't know/not applicable

IF (5) Q17 = [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

Q18 – In what way have your organisation and its members faced this barrier to participate in processes of deliberation and decision making?

Q19 – When you think of the time since the outbreak of COVID-19, to what extent have your organisation and its members been able to influence the outcome of processes of political deliberation and decision making?

- To no extent
- To almost no extent
- To a moderate extent
- To a reasonable extent
- To a significant extent
- To a great extent
- Don't know/not applicable

(6) Q19 = [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

Q20 – In what way have your organisation and its members experienced this inability to influence the outcomes of political deliberation and decision making?

Q21 – How would you describe the level of control of public authorities over youth organisations (organisations of and for youth) in your country PRIOR TO THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK?

- Public authorities control youth organisations
- Public authorities have a lot of influence on youth organisations
- Public authorities have minor influence on youth organisations
- Public authorities have no influence on youth organisations

Q22 – How would you describe the level of control of public authorities over youth organisations (organisations of and for youth) in your country SINCE THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK?

- Public authorities control youth organisations
- Public authorities have a lot of influence on youth organisations
- Public authorities have minor influence on youth organisations
- Public authorities have no influence on youth organisations

Q23 – When you think of the time since the outbreak of COVID-19, how often have you been invited by public authorities to participate in formulation of solutions addressing the problems relevant for your field of activity (consultations etc.)?

	Never	Rarely	Often
Local	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
National	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
European, international level	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q24 – When you think of the time since the outbreak of COVID-19, how would you describe the collaboration of youth organisations with public authorities?

WILLINGNESS TO SEEK OPINION:

- the opinion of youth organisations is always encouraged
- the opinion of youth organisations is sometimes encouraged
- the opinion of youth organisations is neither encouraged nor discouraged
- the opinion of youth organisations is sometimes discouraged
- the opinion of youth organisations is always discouraged

(7) Q24 = [1, 2, 3, 4]

Q25 – What does this encouragement/discouragement look like?

Q26 – When you think of the time since the outbreak of COVID-19, how would you describe the collaboration of youth organisations with public authorities?

WILLINGNESS TO ACKNOWLEDGE OPINION:

- the opinion of youth organisations is always taken into account
- the opinion of youth organisations is frequently taken into account
- the opinion of youth organisations is rarely taken into account
- the opinion of youth organisations is never taken into account

Q27 – When you think of the time since the outbreak of COVID-19 as well as time before it, what would you say have been the most common techniques of participation/influencing the processes of deliberation and decision making your organisation uses?

Multiple answers are possible

- Personal (face to face or online) conversations/meetings
- Telephone calls
- Sending of opinions or materials via e-mail or regular post
- Preparation of amendments to acts/laws/measures
- Open letters published in the media
- Offline public meetings, hearings and open houses (with authorities)
- Offline discussions, consultations, plenums (without public authorities)
- Online public meetings and presentations (with public authorities)
- Online discussions, consultations, plenums (without public authorities)
- Protests, marches, parades and demonstrations
- Online pressure campaigns
- Online and offline petitions
- Boycott campaigns
- Cyber attacks
- Sit-ins
- Occupation of public property
- Other:

Q28 – DIMENSION 2: Freedoms of information and expression

Q29 – When you think of the time since the outbreak of COVID-19, to what extent has your organisation been able to access the information you seek (including financial information) from government sources?

- Not at all

- With great difficulty
- With significant difficulty
- With some difficulty
- To a reasonable extent
- Fully
- Don't know/not applicable

(8) Q29 = [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

Q30 – What type of barriers/difficulties you encountered?

Q31 – When you think of the time since the outbreak of COVID-19, to what extent has your organisation been able to freely express yourself in public without fear of retribution?

- Not at all
- With great difficulty
- With significant difficulty
- With some difficulty
- To a reasonable extent
- Fully
- Don't know/not applicable

(9) Q31 = [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

Q32 – What were the threats you have faced?

Q33 – When you think of the time since the outbreak of COVID-19, to what extent has your organisation and its individuals been able to freely use the internet (to both access information and communicate)?

- Not at all
- With great difficulty
- With significant difficulty
- With some difficulty
- To a reasonable extent
- Fully
- Don't know/not applicable

(10) Q33 = [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

Q34 – In what way has this barrier been felt?

Q35 – DIMENSION 3: Rights of assembly and association

Q36 – When you think of the time since the outbreak of COVID-19, to what extent has the government unjustifiably restricted the ability of organisations and their supporters to participate in public assemblies and demonstrations?

- To no extent
- To almost no extent
- To a moderate extent
- To a reasonable extent
- To a significant extent
- To a great extent
- Don't know/not applicable

Q37 – When you think of the time since the outbreak of COVID-19, to what extent have your organisation and its members been able to organise and/or participate in public assemblies and demonstrations without fear of retribution?

- Not at all
- With great difficulty
- With significant difficulty
- With some difficulty
- To a reasonable extent
- Fully
- Don't know/not applicable

(11) Q37 = [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

Q38 – What kind of retribution do you have fear of?

Q39 – When you think of the time since the outbreak of COVID-19, to what extent has your organisation been able to function independently and free of government interference?

- Not at all
- With great difficulty
- With significant difficulty
- With some difficulty
- To a reasonable extent
- Fully
- Don't know/not applicable

(12) Q39 = [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

Q40 – In what way could this interference be felt?

Q41 – When you think of the time since the outbreak of COVID-19, to what extent have the public authorities provided support to your organisation (for example, financial resources, ability to use premises etc.)?

Public authorities:

- provide full support
- provide support to a reasonable extent
- provide no support

(13) Q41 = [1, 2]

Q42 – In what way has your organisation received support from public authorities after the COVID-19 outbreak?

Multiple answers are possible

- Financial support
- Provision of offices, halls, places to work
- Provision of human resources
- Provision of equipment
- Other:

Q43 – When you think of the time since the outbreak of COVID-19, have public authorities imposed any restrictions to your organisation?

- Yes, they impose significant undue restrictions
- Yes, they impose some undue restrictions
- No, they do not impose any restrictions

(14) Q43 = [1, 2]

Q44 – Please describe the imposed restrictions

Q45 – Do your organisation or other youth organisations in your country experience barriers to access foreign funding (e.g. EU, funding from other international organisations, foundations)?

- Yes, significant
- Yes, minor
- No, none

(15) Q45 = [1, 2]

Q46 – What kind of barriers to access foreign funding are imposed on them? By whom?

Q47 – Have any of those barriers emerged after the outbreak of COVID-19? If yes, which?

Q48 – When competing for public funding or being evaluated for activities performed, to what degree are youth organisations assessed by "market" indicators (e.g. the amount of private funds acquired; basic quantitative indicators etc.)?

- Non-existent or virtually non-existent
- To a moderate degree
- To a noticeable degree
- To a great degree

(16) Q48 = [2, 3, 4]

Q49 – What are these "market" indicators? Please list them.

Q50 – Have any of those barriers emerged or worsened after the outbreak of COVID-19? If yes, which?

Q51 – DIMENSION 4: The rule of law

Q52 – When having in mind young people, to what extent are young people in your country free from political pressures?

- Not at all
- To a very limited extent
- To a limited extent
- Moderately
- Mostly
- Fully
- Don't know/not applicable

(17) Q52 = [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

Q53 – In what way do young people face this barrier(s)?

IF (17) Q52 = [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

Q54 – Have any of those barriers emerged or worsened after the outbreak of COVID-19? If yes, which?

Q55 – In your view, particularly when having in mind young people, to what extent is there an effective rule of law in your country?

- Not at all
- To a very limited extent
- To a limited extent
- Moderately
- Mostly
- Fully
- Don't know/not applicable

(18) Q55 = [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

Q56 – In what way do young people face this barrier(s)?

IF (18) Q55 = [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

Q57 – Have any of those barriers emerged or worsened after the outbreak of COVID-19? If yes, which?

Q58 – ORGANISATIONAL DETAILS/DETAILS ABOUT INFORMAL GROUP OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Q59 – Please name the country your organisation is primarily based in

Q60 – Please provide your organisational details. My organisation is:

	Yes	No
Public	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Non-profit	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Informal group of young people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Association of organisations (umbrella organisation)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Organisation/informal group of young people active in the field of youth work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youth-led organisation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q61 – My organisation is:

- Primarily a service-providing organisation
- Primarily an expressive (advocacy) organisation

Q62 – My organisation is:

- Primarily an organisation OF young people (mostly youth membership/staff)
- Primarily an organisation FOR young (mostly non-youth membership/staff)

Q63 – What is the size of your organisation?

Num
ber

Number of members (if relevant)

Number of individuals receiving some sort of financial compensation for their involvement in organisational activities

Employees (in full time estimate – e.g. two persons half-time equals one full time estimate)

Regular volunteers (regular volunteer – a person that volunteers at least one hour per week)

Q64 – What are the main fields of activity of your organisation (e.g. sport and leisure, non-formal education, youth rights advocacy)?

Q65 – What profiles of young people do your organisation primarily target?

Q66 – FINANCIAL SITUATION OF THE ORGANISATION/INFORMAL GROUP OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Q67 – What was the overall size of funding of your organisation in the last budgetary year (the entire budget of the organisation – e.g. €50 000)?

- Under €10 000
- Between €10 000 and €30 000
- Between €30 000 and €50 000
- Between €50 000 and €100 000
- Between €100 000 and €300 000
- Above €300 000

Q68 – Has the size of financial resources of your organisation SINCE THE OUTBREAK OF COVID-19:

- Significantly decreased
- Decreased
- Stayed the same
- Increased
- Significantly increased

Q69 – Has the size of workload (work performed) of your organisation SINCE THE OUTBREAK OF COVID-19:

- Significantly decreased
- Decreased
- Stayed the same
- Increased
- Significantly increased

Q70 – Has the size of resources granted from public funds of your organisation SINCE THE OUTBREAK OF COVID-19:

- Significantly decreased
- Decreased
- Stayed the same
- Increased

Significantly increased

(19) Q70 = [1, 3]

Q71 – What is the size of increase/decrease of public funds acquired by your organisation SINCE THE OUTBREAK OF COVID-19?

Q72 – When taking into account the activities of your organisation, do you believe the amount of public resources acquired by your organisation is:

- Adequate
- Somewhat inadequate
- Inadequate
- Extremely inadequate