



Insight Report

FAJDP



“This virus come to condition our reality. Nowadays we can’t be doing what we like the most.” Portuguese young women’s visions about the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns and the future

On 10th November 2021, FAJDP has carry out our story curation activities with a group of young women who had already participated with us to gather and tell their stories of lived experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This activity took place in FAJDP House of Associations and the group came from a School from Matosinhos (a city near to Porto), where they are studying Social Cultural Animation.

All participants – 12 in total – are girls and aged between 17 and 19 years old.

“When the first [COVID-19] news came, we relativised. And we didn’t think it would be such a serious thing.” – The initial impacts of the pandemic

As with many people around the world, these young women were surprised by the first news about this virus. And, as many of us, they didn’t think this was something to really consider as a part in our daily lives.

The fear of the unknown was a common feeling among them, but it took a while until they completely realized how complex the situation was. Getting used to the face masks, social distancing and hygienic rules was their new reality and they were a little afraid they couldn’t keep up with school classes over distance.



Some of the young people had said that in the beginning they felt it was something going on far away in China and so it didn't really affect them in Portugal. When they realized the severity of what was going on and the need for lockdowns, they acknowledged how the world is all connected and how local, small actions can have an impact worldwide.

“During our lives, we always listen that was important to be with other people and sharing things with them.” – Changes to day-to-day life

In Portugal it is very common to hug and give two kisses to the face when we meet someone, as a part of our cultural heritage. Parents, family, and society in general are always encouraging their teenagers to be out, away from electronic devices – really connecting with each other's. Large family dinners and going out with friends, for example, was common and regular stuffs in these young people's lives. Lockdown, then, signalled some big changes to day-to-day life in Portugal.

All of them had spoken about how they felt during the lockdowns – how hard it was for them. Some had referenced how different (and sad) their summer vacations, Xmas, and other holidays were. Until that point of their lives, family and educators strongly advise them to be close to people and share a hug, for example. And since March 2020, the rules have completely changed.

This is a group who really like their school, teachers, and colleagues. So, for them it was difficult to be lock at home, far away form their friends and relatives. Social media and classes through Teams or Zoom were their new reality and a way to be with others, but for them was not enough, was not the same.

“My father had already gotten the vaccine a week ago and he got it anyway.” – Living with COVID-19



Some young women from this group had experience of living with the virus at home – because relatives had got infected or they had even caught it themselves. For those girls, the lockdown was even more stressful because they had to live aside from the rest of the family.

They talked about how the routines changed at home – meals were served in isolation, hygienic rules became even stricter – and how they felt obliged to stay in their room as much as possible: *"routines had changed, when we sleep, meals were served in the bedroom, and I was always lock in my bedroom"* said one of them.

Other girl had mention it was hard because she couldn't be with their parents, and she ended: *"I don't want to live that again; I hated the experience"*.

All of them were very happy with the arrival of the vaccine, but they recognize that, despite this, it is necessary to continue to be careful - *"it doesn't just happen to others"*, some mentioned. And when it happens, it could be very dangerous to your safety and health.

"To have fun without rules, without anything..." -

Like most people, these girls miss their lives before COVID-19. These are young, adolescent girls who gave a lot of importance to their relationships with friends, who started to get out at night during weekends and had their first romantic relationships.

Most of them had mention how hard it is to live in this new reality and all of them want to have fun and do regular stuff without thinking about hygiene or social distancing rules. So, they often related how anxious they are and how they miss those old times when they could do their activities without thinking that much. Some of them had shared how they were sad about getting locked down at home and how, simultaneously, they were scared to get out when it was possible.



However, they also realize how this lockdown experience had given them the opportunity to really engage with their closest family, at home. They had connected on another level with their siblings and parents, even though that means to be away from other relatives such as grandparents.

Conclusion

- a) Being Connected: Internet access was very important to keep in touch with their friends and to attend school classes. Although the internet was something available and easy to use, they were afraid their school grades and the learning process in general was harmed.
- b) Self-Reflections: In these two years, they realized how fragile life can be, how things could change very quickly and how we are all connected – one's actions have impact in others lives, and everybody should look for each other.
- c) Dualities: On one hand, they were sad to be at home, without social events, friends, or school. But, when the lockdowns ended, they were afraid to be again around other people. Also, they appreciate the time at home with their close family, although they miss other distant relatives.
- d) Group Empathy: During this workshop, girls had shared stories and realities that not everyone in the group were totally aware of. Sharing that reality made them understand better what everyone went through that period and create a better, more cohesive and understanding group.

About CONTINUE

CONTINUE supports young people experiencing social exclusion to tackle the specific challenges of post-COVID times in terms of staying connected and integrated into European communities. The project is being delivered by a consortium of 8 NGOs from



different European countries who are experienced in youth education and communitybased activities.

The work involves storytelling, social action projects, policy development, knowledge exchanges, an outreach campaign and the creation of an online platform. As part of this project, Community Reporting activities are being delivered with young people across Europe to explore their experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic and what can support them as part of the COVID-19 recovery period. This learning will be used in the CONTINUE project to kick-start social actions led by the young people in their communities.

Community Reporting is a digital storytelling movement founded by People's Voice Media and supports people to tell their own stories, in their own ways in order to catalyse change within processes, policy and practice.

You can find out more here: <https://peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk>

This insight report has been produced by FAJDP – Porto Federation of Youth Associations – and is based on 12 stories gathered from young people living in Matosinhos – Porto / Portugal. All of the stories from young people that have been gathered on the project can be listened to here: <https://communityreporter.net/continue>