



# "COVID CAME IN A COMPLETELY CHANGED EVERYTHING"

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THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON YOUNG  
PEOPLE FROM OTHER COUNTRIES LIVING IN BUDAPEST

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INSIGHT REPORT

## Introduction

In the framework of the CONTINUE project, Artemisszió Foundation gathered the stories of young people from migrant backgrounds about their experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic while living in Budapest. The youngsters who came to the sessions were mostly living in Hungary on a temporary basis, pursuing studies or volunteering in Budapest. We prompted them to record and share stories that highlight different aspects of their experiences of the pandemic. In general, they all reported difficulties in coping with the restrictions and the pandemic's social and emotional implications, but they also shared some of their strategies to overcome the difficulties.

### **“It was hard for everyone” – Isolation and mental health**

All storytellers reported some form of anxiety, stress, depression or other difficult emotional states. One storyteller rated her level of depression at around 6-7 on a scale of 10. Most of the difficulties were associated with the lockdown and the fact that the youngsters could not meet their peers. For one storyteller it was the loss of the chance to play team sports:

“What it changed the most was for the sports team and being able to do sports with a lot of people...when it started I was playing rugby with my team, but it was contact sport, so I was not able to do it, so I lost the taste...”

This suggests that lockdown has had longer term implications on their desire to play the sport, as well as the immediate impact of not being able to play during the pandemic. Another person told us:

“All of the extracurricular things that you do or the friends that you hang out with just went out the window, and because we were not able to go out more than once a day, we became a lot more sedentary...and obviously everything became very insular and in-focused because we were not going out and connecting to people as much.”

One storyteller also reported that after the lockdown, it was difficult to reconnect

with friends, because he was anxious when he met them again after a long period of social distancing.

## **“I think we've all worked harder on strategies to deal with being restricted” – Coping mechanisms**

Storytellers also described their strategies of coping with the situation. In times of lockdown, many tried “to focus on myself more, on the smaller and indoor things”, such as reading more, watching movies, running, regular workouts, or carrying out upcycling, creative activities using materials that could easily be sourced.

One person emphasised the importance of having a warm family atmosphere: “I was very lucky that I got on well with my family, so I had a good support system.”

## **“Overcoming the fear of the unknown” – Living with uncertainty**

A common point in most of the stories was the uncertainty connected to the pandemic. “After a while I got used to the situation that nothing is for sure,” which was not easy to do, with some explicitly stating that it was difficult. Others implied the fact of uncertainty by adding “Covid permitting” to mentions of their future plans. At the same time some of them also could look at the situation of the lockdown as an opportunity: “I was looking for things that can add to me something,” suggesting that the break afforded by lockdown has given some time to work on themselves.

## **Key findings**

In conclusion, the key learnings from the stories are:

- The youngsters suffered from lockdown mainly because they could not participate in their usual group activities or meet their friends;
- They created various strategies for coping with the situation, such as reading, watching movies, working out;
- The sense of uncertainty has stayed with them and will likely be long-term.

## 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 community based 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 ARTEMISSZIÓ FOUNDATION and is based on 13 stories from young people living in BUDAPEST, HUNGARY. All of the stories from young people that have been gathered on the project can be listened to here: <https://communityreporter.net/continue>

# C O N T I N U E



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