

"Get your happiness back."

Young People in a Post-COVID World: Recommendations for Policy & Practice in Berlin, Germany

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a big challenge for young people in Germany and beyond. This briefing details specifically how young people living in Berlin, Germany have been adversely affected by the global crisis.

Produced as part of the CONTINUE project, this briefing draws up lived experiences, qualitative interviews, applied pilot activities and knowledge exchanges to provide its recommendations on how such negative impacts can be supporting during the local recovery from the pandemic.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the lives of many young people in Germany and all over the world. New challenges had to be faced which evoked many changes in social behaviours and mental health. We can see disengagement within all sorts of spheres leading to isolation, loss of interest in hobbies and deterioration of education and learning. Especially those who come from marginalised groups are left behind, as they are lacking support systems and those that are available do not reach them as effectively. This briefing demonstrates that there is still a lot needed to achieve structures that reach everyone to help young people overcome their fears, anxieties and symptoms that have developed over the time of the pandemic. We can also see that the needs of young people are not very much taken account of in the decision-making sphere.

The evidence that has contributed to the briefing includes lived experiences of young people from Berlin, interviews with local policy and decision-makers, learning from the application of social actions in the areas, and a knowledge exchange session attending by a range of local actors and stakeholders. This briefing presents specific recommendations for policy and practice intended to have long-term positive effects on young people and relate to policy areas around mental health, political engagement, and safe spaces. They demonstrate what can support young people and their communities during COVID.

Key impacts of COVID-19 on young people in Berlin

- **Health and wellbeing** – high levels of anxiety, poor mental and physical health, isolation, loss of vocabulary, slower interactions;

CORE RECOMMENDATIONS

The core recommendations in this briefing are:

- More counselling and mentoring for young people and their families;
- More cooperation between families and teachers, as well as between teachers and policy makers;
- More help for vulnerable and marginalised people;
- More resources needed for stakeholders and young people to stay in contact or reconnect.

- **Education and careers** – disengagement with education, damaged career prospects, feeling of having lost their future, feeling that the education that they have been given did not impact them;
- **Social issues and inequalities** – poverty and abuse (mental and physical) have doubled, isolation, frustration with the system, the feeling of being left alone and helplessness dominated but this feeling depended in many cases (-but not exclusively) on the social status of the parents.

In order to address these issues:

- Listen to youngsters ideas, worries and problems;
- Open spaces for unfolding and sharing ideas secluded for young people;
- More diversity in stakeholders and policy-makers.

Creating change and COVID-19 recovery in Berlin

- We need to listen and take care of young people and their worries. Support for families and youngsters is of high importance to get them back on track with their education. The relevance of social workers is very high here as they have an easier access to families and youth. There has to be support for mental health but as well education;
- Youth need places where they can be among peers and openly without any taboos speak about their needs and wants, their problems and difficulties that they are facing in their private lives. This not only builds communities but strengthens their abilities to communicate their problems. It is the first step to then reach out to stakeholders. However the stakeholders need resources and capacity to carry on the outreach, as they need to take their offer to the young people;

- We need more diversity in stakeholders and policy-makers who can reach out to marginalised families and youngsters. Who have similar backgrounds and can sympathise with young people and their problems and worries. Those have to be in schools and youth centres but should also approach employers and public spaces.
- Policy-makers need to take into account that, during the lockdown, students financially were left on their own, having lost their jobs and no possibilities to gain money during the lockdown, put them in a very hard position. They could not financially rely on their parents either, as most of them were in a problematic situation themselves. Here better support was and is needed.

Wider context

The key insights around policy and local agendas include:

- That stakeholder engagement activities need to focus more thoroughly on creating better structures for them to be reachable, as well as reach out more towards vulnerable groups and migrants.
- An important point is the funding for stakeholder. They need to rely on continuous funding so that projects which are taking place have a long-term effect on its participants.
- Similar goes for young people – they need resources which are free to use, so they can develop skills, build a community and enrich their lives.

Key Learnings

- Many youngsters gave up on themselves and the structures surrounding them. Their fear of missing out, losing time to do great things lead to isolation and mental health problems;
- Support services are not able to reach marginalised groups partly because they are not diverse enough, partly they lack capacity and funding;
- The situation of how young people came through the pandemic depended on their social sphere – in many cases young people talk about better ties within the family, others talk about more violence. The situation is getting worse since the start of the Ukrainian war and many stakeholder strategies and plans have to be re-designed to comfort not just the young people in crisis due to the pandemic but as well to the newly arrived refugees. There is among the decision-makers a feeling that the system is at the end of capacity.

Policy & practice recommendations

- Create safe spaces for young people to exchange their ideas and worries with their peers and promote them to the peers;
- Develop structures and funding for more social workers to intervene e.g. in schools, free time activity houses, family consultants or at least help young people to become such persons themselves and self-organise
- Give young people the opportunity to let them be heard and involved in designing solutions together with the decision makers.

METHOD

This policy and practice briefing has been produced as part of the CONTINUE project. It uses:

- Data from young people's stories gathered using [Community Reporter methodology](#), which facilitates people sharing lived experience in order to create social change;
- Information gathered during interviews with local and pan-European stakeholders.
- Information gathered from young people and youth workers during the social action co-creation process;
- Information shared during Conversation of Change events and Knowledge Exchanges, both local and pan-European. These were held with young people, youth workers, and policy- and decision-makers.

At each stage, this data has been synthesised into reports which have informed the next stages. These have, ultimately, been synthesised to inform these policy and practice recommendations.

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. It is co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.

Find out more by scanning the QR code.



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