

# Fighting youth isolation and disempowerment through youth-led social groups.

## Young People in a Post-COVID World: Recommendations for Policy & Practice in Denmark

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This briefing will present findings from the CONTINUE project activities implemented by Crossing Borders in Denmark. Through a process of storytelling, mobilisation, conversations of change, social actions, and knowledge exchange, a series of key topics that youth have struggled with during the COVID-19 pandemic have been identified. These topics will be discussed, along with a series of recommendations for supporting youth post-pandemic.

### CORE RECOMMENDATION

The core recommendation in this briefing is to increase funding for youth-run and youth-led projects in the Danish system to bring power back to young communities and allow them to use their own voices.

### Introduction

The main context of this brief is exploring solutions to the challenges that young people living in Denmark are facing.

In particular, the brief addresses the main identified impacts of COVID-19 on the lives of young people in Denmark, which are as follows:

- lack of motivation;
- social isolation;
- decline of mental health
- lack of power for youth.

This briefing is important in how it can help us to address some of the long-lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and create change for youth.

This brief was developed based on the findings of the CONTINUE project activities implemented in Denmark, with the support of youth workers, teachers, and youth themselves who weighed in on the challenges and their potential solutions.

This briefing presents key knowledge on the impact of youth-led groups, and explores their impacts in fighting many of the challenges that youth have been left with post-pandemic.

### Impact of COVID-19 on young people in Denmark

From storytelling and story curation sessions with youth in Danish high-schools we were able to identify certain key topics surrounding the impact of COVID-19 on young people. Youth were impacted by COVID-19 in many ways, but there were certain common themes that were evident across most of the perspectives within the Danish context. These were as follows: a lack of

motivation in school, social isolation, and declining mental health.

The insights gained from these storytelling sessions, highlighted the benefits of engagement in education, independence and autonomy from the family home, having time to focus on their own interests outside of school, and vibrant social lives with community involvement as a key aspect.

The impact of the challenges faced during the pandemic has been long-lasting, with many young people still suffering from issues such as social isolation, mental health problems, and an inability to focus in school since returning to physical environments. As a result, it is important that we focus on ways to empower youth to overcome these challenges.

### Creating change and COVID-19 recovery in Denmark

One of the key areas that our social actions group chose to focus on was their perceived lack of power and voice during the course of the pandemic. For them, the pandemic highlighted that even when their milestones, opportunities and resources were being stripped away from them, they had no voice, no say, and no power in the decision-making process.

Through social actions with a group of young people, we sought to develop ways to get power back through a youth-led social group designed to encourage community, and to facilitate discussions on social action, using youth voice, and mental health. This addressed multiple issues at once: it fought the issue of social isolation, allowed youth to take the driver's seat to their own future, encouraged community bonds, and gave a space for youth to discuss their feelings, emotions and wellbeing.

## Wider context

Through discussing the project with a series of stakeholders such as teachers, NGO leaders, and other decision-makers, we were able to gain insights into the possibilities from a different perspective. Through these conversations, we learned that the issues identified in our storytelling sessions with youth were very reflective of the perspectives of teachers and others working or decision-making in the field of youth. They identified the key issues of social isolation and the impact that has had on the youth they work with, and the significant increase in mental health issues. They also identified that youth have felt excluded from decision-making and have become dejected from their lack of voice.

One of the strongest recommendations from these activities was to take the actionable step of giving the power to the youth. Don't just give them a voice, give them control of the steering wheel designing projects, events, trainings, start-ups, etc. We can help by listening and responding to them.

## Key learnings

The key learning from the CONTINUE project so far was that the challenges for youth have been amplified during and post-pandemic. While issues like social isolation, mental health decline, lack of motivation, and lack of power were present pre-pandemic, they were made more noticeable and accelerated by the specific conditions of the pandemic. These issues can be solved by giving youth a seat at the table, and providing them with more autonomy and say in their own future.

## Policy & practice recommendations

- **Increased funding pools/grants for youth-led projects relating to social issues.** Youth should be given increased opportunities to develop their own projects that fight social issues. This is an extremely rewarding and empowering process for youth that helps them overcome their feelings of a lack of control and lack of voice, and allows them to build networks and community connections. We can support youth by pressuring governments and funding bodies (both governmental and nongovernmental) to open more grant pools up for youth designed and led projects.
- **Social-actions training included in Education.** Learning about social actions is an empowering experience for youth that should not be limited to projects, but should be incorporated into schooling systems. This would include how to identify social issues, create social actions, and how to sustain social actions in the long-term. Recommendation aimed at schools and education professionals (governmental and nongovernmental).
- **Youth-led groups as a supportive resource to professional mental health services.** The impact of youth-led groups in this project has been extremely effective in combatting social isolation, loneliness, lack of motivation, and feeling disconnected. It is our belief that youth-led groups that focus on mental health could be a strong benefit to traditional therapy, where youth who are already seeing a therapist could also be recommended to join a youth group of fellow peers to discuss mental health in a de-stigmatising community environment. Recommendation aimed at mental-health services and professionals.

## 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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