

“This is the new normal.”

Young People in a Post-COVID World: Recommendations for Policy & Practice in Porto, Portugal

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After 2 years of living a completely new reality due to the COVID-19 pandemic, young people around Portugal – specifically the Porto District – had important considerations to be heard.

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 been a challenge for people all around the world. Young people were no exception and had to connect with new realities that altered their lives and routines, from family life to school and peer groups. This briefing details specifically how young people living in Porto District have been adversely affected by the global crisis.

During the pandemic, young people get often stuck in their homes because of the lockdowns. That has increased their time facing a computer – to have online classes and to meet family and friends – but the feeling of isolation also increased. And for those who already faced difficulties before the pandemic - namely economic - having access to the Internet or an adequate computer was not always easy. The return to a normal life has exposed the impacts of the pandemic. But also, has given us the opportunity to act, to have young people more engage in their schools and communities.

The evidence that has contributed to this briefing includes lived experience of young people from Porto, interviews with local policy- and decision-makers, learning from the application of social actions, and a knowledge exchange session attended 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. They demonstrate what can support young people and their communities during COVID-19 recovery, whilst simultaneously increasing their socio-political engagement in local governance.

CORE RECOMMENDATIONS

The core recommendations in this briefing are:

- More awareness of cyberbullying and how to prevent it;
- More attention on mental health, particularly problems that arise from relationships;
- Having "1 day of the profession" in schools or a professional fair in the community, where the young people can explore the reality of different careers.

Key impacts of COVID-19 on young people in Porto

- Young people need to feel safe and understood, specifically at school, where they can find someone to talk to about their feelings and thoughts without being judge.
- To safely move around digital gadgets and Internet, all community – young people, teachers, parents - need to skill up their knowledge to prevent Cyberbullying impacts.
- To be able to make more conscious and knowledge-based choices for their professional future. So, it is necessary to bring the professional environment closer to schools.

Creating change and COVID-19 recovery in Porto

During the social actions process, our key learnings were:

- Mental Health and wellbeing in general are something young people are more aware now than before. For them is important to have a safe space where they and their families can address that, along with the school system;
- Conflicts are a reality they want to address – especially the ones that result from online interaction and occur between couples. Co-creation processes let them understand that they have a voice and they can do something about it, in an active way;
- All the uncertainty about the future (a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine), make them more anxious but also more proactive in that they want to learn more about professional outcomes;

- Online life was very important during lockdowns, but it was also something that allowed young people to engage less with education. They just needed to be online, but not participating. When returning to offline events – like classes or a social event – some reported, they just don't want to make that effort.

Wider context

Right now in Portugal, how to manage post-pandemic reality and translate those reflections into specific policy recommendations is something raw. Health systems have some particular and important initiatives regarding it, but a systemic approach is non-existent. Youth structures were helping young people during the pandemic but not so much aware how they can innovate in post-pandemic reality.

Policy & practice recommendations

- **Be more aware of Cyberbullying in order to prevent it.**
 - Awareness campaigns;
 - Workshops, and trainings about how to use social media in a healthy way, for students, teachers, family, and all community.
 - Based on non-formal education process – bringing Youth Associations and other youth structures related – facilitating workshops and labs about safe online navigation and cyberbullying prevention.
- **Pay more attention to mental health, specifically to problems that arise from relationships.**
 - Psychologists in schools able to work individually, in group and with the families.
 - Creation of safe spaces in schools where all community – young people, teachers, families – can address mental issues with professionals (like psychologists, psychotherapists, coaches, etc).
- **Facing the future closer to reality.**
 - Having "1 day of the profession" in schools or a professional fair in the community, where the young people can explore the reality of being an electrician, fireman, policeman or secretary, for example.
 - Organize online and offline events that can put in direct contact the professional world and reality along with school and educational systems.

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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