

## Young People in a Post-COVID World: Recommendations for Policy & Practice in Potenza, Italy

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We used the insights from European young people's stories gathered using Community Reporter methodology, the Conversation of Change and Knowledge Exchange events and local stakeholders meeting reports, also findings from co-creation processes all carried out as part of the CONTINUE project to produce this policy briefing, which focuses on three thematic areas:

- Mental health of young people;
- Social problems and inequalities;
- Education and employability of young people in the post-covid landscape.

### CORE RECOMMENDATIONS

The core recommendations in this briefing are:

- More counselling and mentoring for young people and their families;
- More cooperation between youth and teachers, as well as between school institutions and policy-makers;
- More co-creation between youth.
- More dialogue between youth and their parents and teachers.

### Introduction

The main context of this brief is exploring solutions to the challenges that young people living in Italy are facing. In particular, the brief addresses the main identified impacts of COVID-19 on the lives of young people in the Basilicata Region, which are as follows:

- social isolation and exclusion,
- lack of local support (from schools and public institutions),
- lack of institutional support (in education, employability, and entrepreneurship),
- limited personal growth and well-being.

The young people that are living in rural areas, do not offer personal growth opportunities in the modern world. They are experiencing challenges with their mental health and well-being, with quality of education/career guidance, and are being further disadvantaged by digital exclusion because lack of proper internet services and safe spaces.

There is a strong need for Local policies supporting youth inclusion into society. Politics should take into account those needs and offer new services, projects, and funds for their implementation.

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

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.

### Key impacts of COVID-19 on young people

The main problem that faces youth is social exclusion. Social isolation on youngsters refers to:

- Isolation in context home, family;
- No safe space for more vulnerable youth like children and teenagers;
- Isolation in context relationships because of no face-to-face settings;
- Negative Impact on self-confidence, no personal growth;
- Education opportunities;
- Working opportunities.

To address these issues: we can:

- Promote forms of aggregation with associations;
- Promote voluntary work;
- Involve cultural bodies to co-create safe space;
- Perform activities building the self-confidence of youth and children;
- Make creative workshops and training projects for inclusiveness;
- Offer psychologists and counselors services for youth;
- Increase the dialogue and co-creation between different actors: public administration, school, youth, and parents.

### Creating change and COVID-19 recovery

In co-creating pandemic-recovery social actions with young people, our key learning was that young people wanted to focus on actions involving peer support, such as a petition for gender-neutral bathrooms and a creativity wall. Young people are receptive to support by and for each other.

## Wider context

Through discussions with stakeholders and our desk-based research activities emerge that:

- education and culture represent the first step for any opportunity in the job market and community life for young people.
- youth should be an active part of society, unfortunately, society seems to be losing interest in youth.
- the physical and mental well-being of young people is an important issue to deal with.

Our discussions have revealed that it is necessary to:

- activate a new listening to young people to understand their real needs after the pandemic,
- create opportunities for young people like Erasmus+ activities and long-term strategy plans, like Next Generation EU,
- act against societal inequalities.

## Key learnings

- Societal inequalities (unemployment, early school leaving, digital exclusion, etc.) have been exacerbated, one effect being a sense of uncertainty, and fear of the future.
- Young people's mental health has declined and support services are not available for free for all.
- Societal isolation (school dropout, school gaps, difficulty establishing relationships) has been exacerbated, one effect being the reduction in safe spaces where young people can find support, discover opportunities, socialize and co-create.

- Young people need to be involved in the co-creation of the programs and services that support them.
- Young people need to be allowed to act on their own for social and community issues building their self-confidence (The Social Hubs, Peer-to-peer education, and support).

## Policy & practice recommendations

- Create a regional service of career guidance for students and postgraduates;
- Entrepreneurship education at school for students;
- Offer Employability mentoring service for students / postgraduate students;
- Offer a practical stage and real work experience for students;
- Offer mobility experience (Erasmus+, cultural exchanges, voluntary services abroad) as a part of the school programme to increase their personal development;
- Create aggregation hubs for social and educational purpose in public spaces like Public Libraries for example;
- Offer psychologist support for students in all schools. This service is not accessible for most of youth, and it is expensive;
- Offer free internet in rural areas, using public spaces like libraries or the large band for citizens of small communities to improve their accessibility to online education and internet in general.

## 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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