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“THE PANDEMIC MADE LIKE OUR LIFE VERY UNCERTAIN”

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON YOUNG
PEOPLE'S LIVES IN ITALY, POLAND, ROMANIA, FRANCE,
BELGIUM, TURKEY

INSIGHT REPORT

Introduction

This report provides an overview of the key findings that have emerged from a set of stories gathered as part of the CONTINUE Project, reflecting on young people's experiences of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The stories included in the report were gathered from young people who attended the international Youth Exchange in Italy, aged from 17 to 27 living in Poland, Romania, France, Belgium, Turkey even China during the Pandemic, and young people from the local community of Potenza (Italy) and the Basilicata region.

The sixteen stories reflect a diverse range of experiences, and whilst the key findings reflect common themes that have emerged from the stories, it is important to note how unique each individual's experience has been.

The stories illustrate how the pandemic affected the opportunities and well-being of Youth.

“The Pandemic has affected my education and the opportunities I had. The school system was not prepared, to have the setting online and there was a lot of confusion... It was a lot of stress for us as a student ”

The Pandemic affected the Education of young people

The ineffective online learning system raised a lot of stress on youth. Online education also affected relations between students and teachers/professors and makes impossible proper interaction and exchange of knowledge. Some young people agree that online education has some good and some weak points.

“I'm studying Law from my home. Some of my teachers I can't even know them personally, I could not meet them...In my studies, you should know your professor... It was boring and useful for my academic life.”

“I was like woke up in the morning and seat in front of my computer, from the morning to the evening, even in the night and because of that I have glasses”

The online mode had a big impact on youth health and well-being

The lack of interaction with people contributed to feelings of depression, isolation, and loneliness.

“Being always online for all activities, working, studying, meeting people it's difficult because you feel so lonely.”

Young people report missing having people around during the pandemic and a strong need for real meetings.

“I need to meet people and I feel like I can't grow because to grow you need to have real meetings”

For one young man that graduated in this period and graduation day was an amazing experience, because he could finally meet some people, professors, and friends at university.

“I was finishing my engineer degree...For the first time in one year, I meet nine people from my university, and I was so happy that I was at the university.”

One of the social isolation impacts on youth and youngsters was mental health problems.

“I started to have like problems with my mental health because I felt very isolated from other people.”

At the same time, it emerges a need to support mental health. There should be more focus on the mental health of children and teenagers.

Some storytellers report poor access to psychotherapists at schools and high costs of therapy that should be guaranteed to avoid depression among teens.

“Having good mental health is not something that should be a privilege... It should be a basic right!”

Some storytellers shared observations about increasing domestic violence and alcoholism during the lockdown that had a negative impact on children from pathological families that could not avoid difficult situations while the home was not a safe space for them.

“When people were stuck at home it was very easy for abusers to abuse their victims.!”

“The pandemic made like our life very uncertain.”

Young people struggle with different contrasting feelings about their personal growth and the future.

Some of them are afraid to take decisions.

“I’m more scared about doing anything, I have to think twice...if I want to do something.”

The Sensation of being blocked/frozen was common.

“Also, like a young person, I feel like I’m stuck. For those two years, we couldn’t do anything.”

“It’s been two years that we are in the Covid situation and every time you are planning something, there is something that happens and covid is coming.”

Some were looking for new solutions, changing their attitude.

“I was that kind of person who was really organized and busy...and with the Covid pandemic I have to really change that and become more flexible let’s say and doing things at the last minute...and I think that has really changed my life that maybe this is also a good thing.”

For somebody, the Pandemic became an opportunity to reflect on their own needs and aspirations. Also facing the difficulties of the Pandemic period and overcoming those challenges by taking some concrete actions.

“ Covid has taught us that there is no time to postpone. There isn’t always time to be able to plan, so it’s right to do it at the moment you’re living.

It’s really covid that prompted me to embark on new adventures. Paradoxically lock down brought me a new job, and it was possible for me to undertake it thanks to smart working (working remotely), otherwise, I could not have.”

“After graduation, I attended and obtained a master’s degree in sustainable tourism.”

They seized opportunities despite the inconveniences.

Key findings

- Ineffective learning: all learning activities online were not effective because the system was not ready for it.
- Sense of isolation: Lack of personal interaction with people during the pandemic contributes to depression and isolation in the context of friends, home, and family. During the lockdown, some pathological phenomena like domestic violence and alcoholism increased. This had a negative impact on children from pathological families that could not avoid difficult situations while the home was not a safe space for them.
- There should be more focus on the mental health of children and teenagers and a safe space for youth and children.
- Uncertainty: people are uncertain about their future and their self-confidence.
- Reflections: Lockdown provided young people with the space to reflect on their lives and gave them an opportunity to think differently about how they use their time and opportunities.

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 YOUTH EUROPE SERVICE and is based on 16 stories gathered from young people living in Italy, Poland, Romania, France, Belgium, Turkey, and China.

All of the stories from young people that have been gathered on the project can be listened to here: <https://communityreporter.net/continue>

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