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**“I FEARED THAT I MIGHT INFECT  
HER WITH THE VIRUS.”**

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THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON YOUNG  
PEOPLE IN BERLIN

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INSIGHT REPORT

## Introduction

As with many of cities in Germany, Berlin had a challenging time during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently the government is talking about the possibility of a 4th lockdown which not only brings back memories of the prior lockdowns and, most significantly, of the first lockdown, but also comes with frustration and despair.

The residents of Berlin – having had many freedoms during all lockdowns – nevertheless found creative ways to manage their everyday life, despite several restrictions. Our peer group – young Berliners who are between the age 20 – 27 – reveal through their stories how they have experienced the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, and unexpectedly enough, many told us about positive moments in which they even enjoyed slowing down on life and used the time to focus on themselves more than usual. However, they also spoke about mental health issues and a general rise in domestic violence.

### **“I can cook lasagne now. ... It's quite a big accomplishment for me.” – Positive aspects of the pandemic**

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our peer group can be divided into positive and negative outcomes.

Positive aspects included the fact that many felt that they had more time for themselves, which they used to be more creative (be it through cooking, baking or by creating art in general). One participant proudly told us “I can cook lasagne now. That would have been impossible before the lockdown. It's quite a big accomplishment for me.”

Others felt that they could connect a lot better with their friends. The one-on-one meetings gave their friendships more room to grow in depth as they became “more emotionally invested with them.”

They were happy that they could consume less and, thus, save money. This led to a rethinking of their consumer behaviour and a strong emphasis on sustainability.

One participant had a very positive outlook on saving money saying: "Now, with the borders open I can use my savings to travel. I have already been to Lisbon and it was great to be able to do that." Another added: "I saw that I do not need to buy more clothes – I have so many already!"

They also enjoyed taking care of the community and helping out elders with, for example, their shopping. This also led to an understanding of protecting vulnerable people from getting the disease.

### **"It broke my heart not being able to be close to her during this awful time." – Negative aspects of the pandemic**

However, there were also down sides to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many felt that politics had failed them, which in some led to critically questioning the current government and its actions.

Looking into an unpredictable future jobwise was something that made many especially uncomfortable as they felt like they could not plan for anything. While no one in our peer group lost their job, many told stories of how their friends were dismissed from their jobs. It hit hardest those who were working in the food service industry and retail.

The rising number of deaths made many fear for their grandparents, whom most of them – in case of an emergency – would not be able to visit or even go to their funeral. One participant said:

"My grandmother broke her hip during the pandemic and there was no possibility for me to help her, because I feared that I might infect her with the virus. It is a miracle that she recovered well from her surgery. But it broke my heart not being able to be close to her during this awful time."

The general distance to, in particular, older family members had led to a lot of negativity in the lives of many young people, especially those from immigrant communities. One participant mentioned that some of her friends suffered from mild depression and that the lockdown isolated them.

There was also concern for the vaccine. Many of our participants did not trust the vaccine in the first place and did not want to be vaccinated. However, they felt pressured into getting vaccinated as they understood that “this is how [they] will gain [their] freedom back.”

## **Key findings**

The pandemic has been challenging for many young people, however they have gained a new view-point on their own life, on their own community (family and friends) but also developed a more sensitive understanding of the community in general. Who are vulnerable people in our society and how can we help or improve their situation? What can I do as a young person? In general – though challenging at times – the young people told stories of positivity and having had a relatively good time during the pandemic.

## 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 COMPARATIVE RESEARCH NETWORK (CRN) and is based on 12 young people living in GERMANY. 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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**Crossing Borders**



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**“LIFE WAS SO DIFFERENT IN SO  
MANY WAYS. I'M NOT SURE I CAN  
GO BACK TO HOW IT WAS”**

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THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON YOUNG  
PEOPLE'S LIVES IN STRETFORD, GREATER MANCHESTER

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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 Community Reporting sessions at Gorse Hill Studios in Stretford, Greater Manchester. The young people learnt about storytelling techniques and developed digital skills, before working in pairs to record interviews exploring each other's experiences of the pandemic. The stories young people contributed to the project 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 categories included in the key findings section of the report were chosen by the young people in a series of curation sessions to help make sense of how young people have been affected by the pandemic.

### **"I was terrified to go back to school because I've missed all the work." – Education**

The transition to and from online and in-person education was challenging for young people to adapt to. Some felt being at home provided a better space for concentration and focus due to fewer distractions, whereas others struggled with finding the self-motivation required when studying from home. Lockdown meant that young people had more free time to spend at home, some used this time to complete homework, whereas others focussed on developing new skills and hobbies. Overall there were mixed feelings about how COVID-19 had impacted the young people's experiences of education, some were less bothered about what they had missed out on, as they didn't enjoy school with some feeling happy about not being there. Others found being away from school stressful as they were concerned about catching up on work and wanted to know when things would go back to what they were used to. When lockdown restrictions were lifted, most young people felt happy to be back in school, particularly when they reunited with friends, although social distancing took some time to adjust to. Wearing masks and remembering the rules was difficult at times and there was a sense of panic around returning to school with restrictions still in place. Young people also reported how



they struggled with behaviour when returning to school, highlighting how they had previously been kicked out of school for bad behaviour. From these findings it is clear that young people would benefit from more support with transitioning in and out of the different learning environments that have been created as a result of COVID. Additional help would minimise stress and ensure young people feel as though they are keeping up with work, particularly those who struggle with self-learning, concentration and behaviour. More awareness and understanding of the potential panic caused by changing restrictions would be beneficial as the situation around COVID continues to evolve.

### **“Life was difficult in so many ways. I'm not sure I can go back to like it was” – Attitudes towards lockdown and restrictions**

Attitudes towards lockdown and restrictions varied in each of the stories and many of the young people felt conflicted in their own attitudes toward the pandemic too. Restrictions continued to impact young people for longer than initially expected, and the continual change was difficult for them to have to adapt to. Some of the storytellers abided by the lockdown rules whereas others struggled to acknowledge restrictions, but regardless of the extent to which the young people decided to follow government guidance, there was a shared feeling of boredom at being stuck at home. Many young people report that restrictions were confusing to follow and some felt like they didn't know what was going on. Watching the news was one way they tried to understand what was happening but the information on offer to them was different everywhere they looked. The relief of restrictions lifting and being able to return to some sense of normalcy was a shared experience. Previously mundane events such as visiting a supermarket to buy food helped them to regain a sense of life before lockdown. Many of the young people report feeling as though lockdown would go on forever, spending lots of time wondering when it would end. Some found resilience in hoping the lockdown and restrictions wouldn't last forever whereas others didn't trust the restrictions to keep them safe. What is clear is that uncertainty was the most common theme in each of the stories in terms of attitudes toward the lockdowns and restrictions. One possible solution to this would be the production of clear, concise and accessible information about newly enforced restrictions relating to COVID-19. Also more informative content created for young people explaining what is happening and what the implications

will be for them would help to build a sense of understanding in younger generations.

### **“After COVID I lost a part of myself, but gradually I’m finding them.” – Mental health and emotional wellbeing**

Young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing was heavily impacted by COVID-19 and the consequential lockdowns and restrictions. There was a significant number of stories which referenced how stress levels were heightened throughout the pandemic, particularly due to fears around restrictions constantly fluctuating. The continual disruption to young people's routines and daily lives, combined with being instructed to stay at home caused stress levels to rise, as did the ongoing news broadcasts and updates and the expectation to continue with school work. Boredom was another common emotion experienced by the young people during the pandemic. Although they had extra free time to spend relaxing and doing hobbies with some appreciating the time to recuperate and understand their emotions, many felt trapped having to stay inside. The lack of interaction with people outside of the home contributed to feelings of depression, isolation and loneliness and whilst social media provided a means of staying in touch, it felt more distant than in-person communication. In one case a young person's social anxiety worsened as they felt they started to forget how to communicate with people. Some storytellers report a rise in confidence levels whilst others felt it was reduced, but what is clear is that the majority struggled with maintaining their mental health and wellbeing. The feeling of being pushed into a new environment without feeling prepared for change causes panic and worry - more support is crucial in order to provide young people with coping strategies for dealing with traumatic experiences such as COVID.

### **“I immersed myself into a creative world” – Social media**

In an ever more secluded environment, social media provided a means of keeping in touch with friends and family and staying connected with the outside world. However as time went on, many young people began to feel frustration towards connecting with people online. One young person felt social media provided a valuable means of escape:

"I immersed myself into a creative world and understood others' worlds by withdrawing from social events."

In embracing social media they found a sense of self they hadn't discovered prior to the Pandemic. Nevertheless in their story they highlight how social media can easily become a toxic environment, particularly when the focus shifts to gaining and maintaining a following. Allowing young people to explore their relationship with social media and realise the potential benefits and harmful effects is vital in ensuring they build a healthy connection with it.

### **"Seeing friends over facetime wasn't the same as seeing them in person." – Building Bonds**

Young people report missing having people around during the heightened stages of lockdown during the pandemic. One young person in particular struggled with the lack of visitors when settling into their new independent living situation away from their foster placement. For other young people the extra time spent at home allowed them to build bonds with those living with them. Lockdown gave one young person more time to build bonds with their new foster carers as they had to stay indoors. Whilst usually they would be out spending time with friends, having a new foster placement at the start of lockdown meant there was more time to bond. Some young people felt scared to reintegrate with friends when lockdown restrictions were lifted, but speaking to friends online helped to ease these feelings. Still the legacy of lockdown left them feeling more distant from people both physically and emotionally.

"Seeing friends over FaceTime wasn't the same as seeing them in person."

The lack of socialisation with friends caused one young person to feel weary of being too needy in social situations, something which reflects how support may have been and could still be vital, but they may be hesitant to seek it out for themselves. In order to prioritise young people's safety, organisations and individuals working with young people need to be observant and aware of some people's tendency to avoid looking for help when they might need it most.

## **“I like to be out doing things - it was hard knowing how to entertain yourself.” – Routines and daily life**

The ongoing disruption to young people's daily routines was hugely influenced by the pandemic, increased periods of time spent indoors was a new experience for many young people. It was difficult for them to maintain the same levels of social interaction with peers in a home environment, but the extra time enabled them to develop new hobbies and skills such as dance, ukulele, gaming, drawing and board games. Over time it got more difficult to find activities and hobbies to do and it started to get boring having everything on repeat for a year. Once they had adjusted to life in lockdown and the routine that came with it, restrictions would change and their existing routine would break down, resulting in many young people feeling lost and the repetition of distance contributed to feelings of loneliness. Nevertheless time spent outside, whether it be exercising or catching up with friends, was a positive experience. One young person commented that Lockdown enabled them to explore their personal style, leading them to become more colourful in what they wanted to wear. One final benefit of the COVID-19 pandemic was the increased opportunity for sleep and rest, young people enjoyed having more time in bed and no longer needing to get up early to commute to school or college. Young people report a key takeaway from the pandemic being the fact they learned that they need time for themselves and they can sometimes enjoy being alone.

### **Key findings**

- Education: More flexibility and support for young people when adjusting to new learning environments would minimise the impact on their education and ensure they feel confident in their ability to keep up with work.
- Attitudes toward lockdown and restrictions: The production of clear, concise and accessible information specifically catering to young people with regards to the implications of the pandemic would make it easier for them to abide by restrictions and feel more informed.
- Mental health and emotional wellbeing: Young people need to be equipped with effective coping strategies for dealing with traumatic experiences such as COVID-19 to minimise the risk of poor mental health and emotional wellbeing.

- Social media and connections: Young people should be provided with a supportive learning space to explore their relationship with social media and the potential benefits and harmful effects it can have.
- Building bonds: People working with young people need to be observant and aware of young people's ability and desire to speak out for support to help prioritise their safety and wellbeing
- Routines and daily habits: Young people have demonstrated a huge level of resilience to the constant disruption caused by the pandemic. The breakdown of routine can have a negative impact on young people's mental wellbeing as can the lack of rest - would it be possible to give them more control over their routines and daily habits?

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This insight report has been produced by PEOPLE'S VOICE MEDIA (PVM) and is based on 15 stories gathered from young people living in STRETFORD, GREATER MANCHESTER in the UK. 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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# **“I WOULDN'T WANT TO BE QUARANTINED AGAIN” / “I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE QUARANTINE AGAIN”**

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THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON YOUNG  
PEOPLE LIVES IN LITHUANIA

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INSIGHT REPORT



## Introduction

The Lithuanian people experienced the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, as did the whole world. In the framework of the CONTINUE project, we will present the pandemic effect on Lithuania's youth, to be more specific, youth living in Vilnius, aged 15-29.

The young people we have been talking to have very different experiences: some saw only the negative side of the pandemic, some saw the positive parts which came unexpectedly together with the pandemic, some told about both sides of their COVID-19 experience. But there are some common feelings that were applicable mostly for all: the hopeless feeling of not knowing what is going on and when will it end, the fear of coronavirus, the fear to get sick with coronavirus, the fear of infecting your loved ones, the fear to meet people in general, missing in-person socialization. However, they were some of the immediate impacts, however we are now seeing some of the longer term impacts after living with COVID-19 for so long. These range from very negative, including anxiety, anger, depression, boredom, lack of motivation to do anything, to the more positive aspects such as getting to know themselves better, discovering the benefits of the pandemic, starting to use those benefits in their lives, using free time more wisely, adapting to the changes and even changing their lifestyles in some healthy ways.

### **"I felt really a bit lonely" – Lack of communication with friends**

One of the most common feelings during the COVID-19 pandemic for youth was the lack of real-life communication with their peers. It was mentioned the most frequently out of any other impacts:

- "All in all, that sociality disappeared, I became more introverted. ... In general, there was generally less communication than in the present."
- "I lacked a lot of communication I would say and I felt really a bit lonely because I couldn't meet someone so normally, to communicate."
- "It was hard to get used to the same borders and little communication. ... For that, I no longer have full communication 'talent' and I find it very difficult to communicate with people."

- "It was very difficult because of that lack of communication, but later I became more focused and easier to control myself. ... The main problem during the pandemic was the lack of communication for me personally, but I think so for most teenagers."
- When it started, I felt very weird because all the social life just got cut off and I needed to spend the whole time at my house."
- "During the quarantine, it was strange to sit at home and not go anywhere, I thought I would go crazy."

The lack of communication affected almost everyone just to a different extent but there has been a lot of research on the impact of isolation for youth it is frequently mentioned that when young people are developing, socializing is crucial as it is part of their growth as people. The youth itself also stress socialization with their peers as having a very important role in their lives. While it could be said that for Generation Z, there are very good in communication technologies to make it easier for them to adapt to lockdown, these were not really a substitute for a physical social life. There were mentioned some tools such as Skype and Discord, but it was also said that "it was very bad to communicate" like that so there could be the assumption that online communication cannot replace physical interaction.

### **"I became lazy" – Lack of motivation during the pandemic**

The second very common sign of the pandemic effect was laziness and lack of motivation. One of the young people who told their story said, "I found myself very much, I started watching myself less, I didn't leave home almost, I became lazy." And even though those people liked "to walk in the woods with friends, go outside" normally, they couldn't do that during lockdown and that lead to the very narrow and "lazy" activities at home like laying "in bed all day" and watching "all kinds of series, movies," and playing "computer games". "Nothing more," one young person said.

This state of being has also affected learning in school. Moving to online platforms was quite a shock to many institutions and schools weren't any exception. As mentioned above, youth were lacking what they needed for communication and not

all of the teachers tried to help with that: "for example, the teachers didn't explain anything to me, I had to find out everything myself or I was just lazy," said one of the young people. Another said, "I couldn't concentrate normally, I didn't have the motivation to learn so much." At such a young age it's difficult to maintain discipline and to keep learning, especially when no one is watching. What is more, there were some actions of cheating and for some, their "grades may have suffered as well." Of course, this wasn't the case for everyone:

"I am an independent person, it was quite easy to find out some topics, I am learning quite well, there were no learning difficulties. But still, if you compare distance learning and contact, it is clear that contact is better because there is that communication at school and with classmates."

So there is quite clear again, that in all spheres of life communication comes back as a key point helping youth to be more motivated and event to focus.

### **"The future is completely mine to live in" – Finding the positives in more free time**

One of the young people we spoke to said, "The only positive thing that was, that [there was] more free time". Of course, that wasn't the main point for the majority of youth, and the pandemic was seen as a very negative thing for some. But it is clear from the stories that many young people used their additional free time positively:

- "The first quarantine gave a little motivation to train (dancing) at home, to be more with myself."
- "Not only did I sit at home, but I also went for a walk, doing various jobs for which I had not found time before ... This time has brought benefits to the completion of everything I had not done before. For example, I cooked, watched series, played sports, and much more."
- "I started to like nature even more, because I spent more and more time outdoors."

- "I had to buy some books, some puzzles to solve. ... I spent so much time focusing on my career ... and focusing on my career was a great experience because it had a huge impact on my education because I was spending so much time for studying for my classes."

For some people, that free time gave the opportunity to find where do they want to be, what do they want to do, meet new and interesting people and also find new opportunities while adapting to the online world:

- "I found my current job and due to pandemic conditions I was able to work there remotely [as it is in another city] ... it was hard, but also a period which brought good things, because I met some people who are very important to me, I found a job that I love and found new activities which I enjoy."
- "And by the time I was alone, a lot had changed in my life. At that time, I realized that I did not want to be in Vilnius, I wanted to return to live in Kaunas, somewhere closer to nature. So I did that - I moved to Kaunas, changed my life completely upside down."
- "I also learned how to work remotely ... it's enjoyable and it increases your effectiveness and in general mood, because you can be in cool places and still work as you would do from home."
- "It really made one big thing easier ... Pandemic taught us that many events, seminars, courses, training can be held online and you can connect to it from anywhere".

So, for some people that free time in quarantine gave them a chance to change their life and they used it. That shows that no matter the circumstances (as it was pretty much the same for everyone in the country), you can do much more than you think if you find motivation to change your life to way you want it to be.

Of course, it may be easy to say because dealing with uncertainty is difficult, dealing with your emotions is difficult and the only person who can help you the most is you. If you don't want changes in your life, no one will make you do anything. There is a story of one young man:

"It affected me very badly because I was super depressed. ... That risk of dying was really affecting me in a bad way ... There is a thing with me when I am doing nothing, I become more angry about life. When I do not like my life, I start to be more angry towards almost everything. ... To deal with that I had to buy some books, some puzzles to solve and what did I do? I spent so much time focusing on my career which had a really good impact on my life. ... I realised that during those times to deal with anger and depression I started to be a philosopher, I guess. Cause I was thinking so much about depth, life and I started to think about the meaning of life ... You become vulnerable both - to the Covid and also you become vulnerable to the bad thoughts ... Right now I am thinking like the future is completely mine to live in, so those COVID times, the things that I did, affected me in a good way as well. I am more optimistic for now, more than pessimistic".

It can be the main message to all the youth – for them to understand that they are responsible for the life they live themselves.

## **Key findings**

The key learnings from the stories are:

- Communication: even though young generation know how to use technologies, it can not replace real-life conversations and socializing, it is crucial to their development.
- Lack of motivation: it is hard for young people to keep themselves motivated for a long time. That also showed that connection with other people also helps them with that – to stay focused and motivated. We could call it the "community effect".
- Free time: for some it gives freedom to relax and do nothing, which can lead into difficult emotional state or even physical diseases, and for others it is the opportunity to take their life into their hands and reach for what they want.

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# "COVID CAME IN A COMPLETELY CHANGED EVERYTHING"

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THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON YOUNG  
PEOPLE FROM OTHER COUNTRIES LIVING IN BUDAPEST

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INSIGHT REPORT



## Introduction

In the framework of the CONTINUE project, Artemisszió Foundation gathered the stories of young people from migrant backgrounds about their experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic while living in Budapest. The youngsters who came to the sessions were mostly living in Hungary on a temporary basis, pursuing studies or volunteering in Budapest. We prompted them to record and share stories that highlight different aspects of their experiences of the pandemic. In general, they all reported difficulties in coping with the restrictions and the pandemic's social and emotional implications, but they also shared some of their strategies to overcome the difficulties.

### **"It was hard for everyone" – Isolation and mental health**

All storytellers reported some form of anxiety, stress, depression or other difficult emotional states. One storyteller rated her level of depression at around 6-7 on a scale of 10. Most of the difficulties were associated with the lockdown and the fact that the youngsters could not meet their peers. For one storyteller it was the loss of the chance to play team sports:

"What it changed the most was for the sports team and being able to do sports with a lot of people...when it started I was playing rugby with my team, but it was contact sport, so I was not able to do it, so I lost the taste..."

This suggests that lockdown has had longer term implications on their desire to play the sport, as well as the immediate impact of not being able to play during the pandemic. Another person told us:

"All of the extracurricular things that you do or the friends that you hang out with just went out the window, and because we were not able to go out more than once a day, we became a lot more sedentary...and obviously everything became very insular and in-focused because we were not going out and connecting to people as much."

One storyteller also reported that after the lockdown, it was difficult to reconnect

with friends, because he was anxious when he met them again after a long period of social distancing.

### **“I think we've all worked harder on strategies to deal with being restricted” – Coping mechanisms**

Storytellers also described their strategies of coping with the situation. In times of lockdown, many tried “to focus on myself more, on the smaller and indoor things”, such as reading more, watching movies, running, regular workouts, or carrying out upcycling, creative activities using materials that could easily be sourced.

One person emphasised the importance of having a warm family atmosphere: “I was very lucky that I got on well with my family, so I had a good support system.”

### **“Overcoming the fear of the unknown” – Living with uncertainty**

A common point in most of the stories was the uncertainty connected to the pandemic. “After a while I got used to the situation that nothing is for sure,” which was not easy to do, with some explicitly stating that it was difficult. Others implied the fact of uncertainty by adding “Covid permitting” to mentions of their future plans. At the same time some of them also could look at the situation of the lockdown as an opportunity: “I was looking for things that can add to me something,” suggesting that the break afforded by lockdown has given some time to work on themselves.

## **Key findings**

In conclusion, the key learnings from the stories are:

- The youngsters suffered from lockdown mainly because they could not participate in their usual group activities or meet their friends;
- They created various strategies for coping with the situation, such as reading, watching movies, working out;
- The sense of uncertainty has stayed with them and will likely be long-term.

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This insight report has been produced by ARTEMISSZIÓ FOUNDATION and is based on 13 stories from young people living in BUDAPEST, HUNGARY. 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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**Crossing Borders**



**Per  
Esemplio**





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**“I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE BACK MY  
SENSE OF SERENITY WHILE BEING  
WITH THE OTHER”**

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THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES IN  
PALERMO, ITALY

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INSIGHT REPORT

## Introduction

This report is a picture of the main feelings, opinions and images of what a group of young people from Palermo felt, thought and saw during the pandemic and how their lives have been impacted by COVID-19. These elements have been taken from the stories collected during storytelling workshops in which 15 young people interviewed each-other starting from the question: "How did the COVID pandemic impact your life?" In a welcoming and comfortable environment, young people have been accompanied through an experience of self-reflection using digital techniques for telling personal stories: snapshot stories, photography icebreakers, storytelling through images, and music. These workshops had one main purpose: to give voice to young people. Autochthonous and youth with a forced migratory background from Tunisia, Maroc, Cameroon, and Ivory Coast between 14 and 30 years old shared their experience of the pandemic through videos or audio.

Each of them has a very different background: some of them are studying, others are working, others have to do both. Some live alone, others share their apartment with peers. Some young people are supported by their family, others struggle to satisfy their basic needs. In this diverse panorama of lives, there is a common ground: the pandemic is an experience made of positive and negative sides, made of fears and discoveries of new talents and old passions, struggles and desires of being connected and cultivating relationships.

### **"I would like to have back the sense of serenity while being with the others. This is the biggest thing I feel I am missing" – Life in a contactless society**

"What did you miss the most during Covid-19 pandemic?" This was a common question that participants posed to each other during the peer-to-peer dialogue interview. Nobody hesitated and all the answers had a common denominator: the contact with people.

For S. it was difficult to keep the physical distance or saying "ciao" without the classic meeting of cheeks, as people are used to do in Sicily: "it was strange not to greet each other" says M., highlighting the value of that gesture.

The relationships of the daily life have been impacted: at work, at school, at University. S. told about the difficulty of following her classes online “without the colleagues” around her with whom exchanging and help each-other to stay focused; A. spoke about how strange and difficult was not to go out from his room for one month and half because of COVID-19 sickness. The only contact with the world outside was receiving food from his sister and his mother through the door.

All this affection, given and received, moved to the virtual space, a less empathetic world for some young people, less fulfilling. Many snapshot stories talked about the first time outside after the first national lockdown, a special moment in which they fully enjoyed their surroundings, the city, the nature and anything was obvious to see before. Nevertheless Zoom call and online activities have been a way to “survive” and still have some social life.

### **“I have some social anxiety” – Anxiety and fears. Emotions to deal with during Covid-19 pandemic**

Fear and anxiety are the most recurrent emotions in the participants' story: “I still have some social anxiety”(M.), “there are still many things I have to overcome [...], The fear of the unpredictability of things” (S.). Young people shared that very often they feel uncomfortable in contexts where there are many people, for example at school: “too many people in a too little space”; they don't know how to greet others, which distance to keep; they fight between the human desire of meeting new people and the fear of contamination, fear for themselves, for their friends, for their family. At the beginning, some of participants did not believe the gravity of COVID-19 as reported by the media, until it get close to them. T., from Cameroon, was thinking it was a lie, until he lost an important person to him. From that moment he started to fear it. Pandemic is leaving its traces among young people but they say they are ready to overcome them.

### **“I worked a lot on myself” – Finding alternative activities to “survive”**

For many young people, pandemic was an excuse for being creative: “I rediscovered the pleasure of reading a book, which I hadn't done for a long time”. Getting bored from staying at home all the day long was an opportunity for

dedicating time to what is usually left aside and most of the time this is about creativity: sport, artisanal work, trekking. Some participants shared how pandemic created a new space for reflection making them change perspective, either towards themselves and others: "I had a lot of time to focus on myself ... I can also look at others with a different, more understanding, less judgmental eye" (S).

Some young people were able to reinvent themselves and relationships: One young man spent lot of time playing games with his family at home; another lost his job with COVID -19, starting a new one as online housing broker. Others found refuge in video games and movies, such as S., who was sleeping all day long and watching series at night or A. who spend much of his quarantine on the PlayStation. During pandemic, it is apparent that young people activated their defence mechanisms, trying to respond as best as possible to the stress of the period.

## **Key findings**

The key learnings from the stories are:

- Contactless society: relationships are the aspect on which covid had the biggest impact for young people. They miss the opportunity for socialization and experiencing the world which seems not to be replaceable by the virtual life.
- Fear and anxiety: Fear and anxiety are the most recurrent emotions in the participants' story
- Alternative activities: For many young people, pandemic was an opportunity to experience new activities, practicing passions already known a left a part due to the so called "lack of time", reinventing relationship.



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This insight report has been produced by PER ESEMPIO and is based on 15 stories from young people living in PALERMO (ITALY). 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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**"OUR TEENAGE YEARS ARE BEING  
TAKEN AWAY JUST BECAUSE THE  
ADULTS CAN'T HANDLE THE  
PANDEMIC"**

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THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 THROUGH THE EYES OF YOUNG  
PEOPLE LIVING IN DENMARK.

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INSIGHT REPORT

## Introduction

At the beginning of 2020, the world was hit with a new kind of uncertainty brought by a previously unknown virus, the varying levels of restrictions imposed across different countries, and lockdowns with undetermined end dates. These lockdowns stretched on and on, and as they did many milestones disappeared in their midst. For young people, many of whom had been waiting their entire lives for these milestones, this was a particularly cutting loss. Whether it was their first school days, their high-school parties, graduations, or their first steps into adulthood, they all went by under the cloak of restrictions. Youth, largely less affected by the COVID-19 disease than the older members of society, still played their part in enduring covid restrictions, while suffering huge losses to their sense of self, their social lives, and their personal growth.

Despite their struggles, youth have largely been denied a seat at the table during policy and decision-making processes, which is echoed by the following quote from one of our storytellers "As teenagers we're supposed to be going out there and doing stuff and having fun and experiencing all those amazing teenage things that people talk about all the time, but I feel like our teenage years are being taken away just because the adults can't handle the pandemic." This is why, through the CONTINUE project, we want to bring youth perspectives into the conversations we are having about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Their voices deserve to be heard, especially when considering the important milestones they have missed out on over the past two years. The stories we have gathered are from the perspective of youth between the ages of 14-17 living in Denmark, many of whom have suffered from a lack of motivation, boredom, strenuous family relationships, and the unpredictable education that the pandemic brought.

### **"It was very easy to disappear from online class, just by one click of a button" - Lack of motivation in school**

The introduction of online classes came with big setbacks to education for many of the storytellers who shared their experiences with us. In the beginning, the casual, disorganised education seemed positive to them, it gave them a break from the structure of education in a physical space, with one storyteller sharing that "at first it seemed like a vacation from school", and another explaining their happiness that

"it was easier to do online school in the beginning when the teachers were not too adjusted with the technologies". Teenagers felt that they were benefitting from their teachers inability to monitor their learning in the same way they had previously, but this happiness at the ease of online school at the beginning was quickly replaced by a lack of motivation. Out of the 17 young people who shared their stories with us, 15 of them mentioned the difficulties of online school, and 9 of them touched on themes of lack of motivation. One particularly impactful quote was from a storyteller who described school as being "difficult to follow up on" due to it being "very easy to disappear from online class, just by one click of a button" this same storyteller went on to say that they "skipped almost an entire year of classes" and when pressed by teachers, they simply stopped answering their calls, following that that they lost their motivation to do their homework entirely. Another storyteller said that they "ended up uploading all the assignments late due to [their] lack of motivation", which resulted in a difficult, year-long process of catching up when they returned to physical schooling. This statement was echoed by another student, who spoke about how difficult it was to remain engaged with online schooling, saying: "I would just do the bare minimum and it was so hard for me". Through being able to get away with not listening to online classes, and through an overall lack of structure, many students found it hard to reach even the basic effort they had previously been capable of. Many of the youth felt the effects of online classes even after returning to their normal educational environments, with one storyteller saying that "the year after I had to build myself back up because I forgot a lot of things during lockdown".

Overall, despite the lack of structured education seeming like a break at the beginning of the pandemic, the easiness of "accessing the meetings online, muting them, and scrolling through social media" evolved into a lack of motivation, which many are still finding their way back from. These struggles can be hugely impactful on youth during important years of learning, in which many young people find their passions and personal areas of interest through what they are taught in classes. The impact of young people losing their capacity to focus during these integral years of development could see an increased number of young adults who haven't had the opportunity to evolve their own interests.

## **"I didn't want to be social with my family" - Family matters**

One important perspective gained from the youth who engaged in storytelling was the increased amount of time they spent with their families. For some, it was a positive experience, with one storyteller sharing how the pandemic gave them the opportunity to spend quality time with their family, watching movies together every evening, but for others the impact that covid had on their families was difficult. One of the storytellers shared details about their family dynamic that became more uncomfortable with their increased proximity to each other, they shared that their relationship with their family during the pandemic "was not that good, me and my family are not that close". They felt a particular strain with their relationship with their mother, who they lived with during the pandemic, together with their stepfather and half-siblings "me and my step-father are decently close, but me and my mother just don't fit well together" the strain was intensified by the fact that they were expected to help with taking care of their younger siblings, which was not fun for them. Another storyteller shared that, despite being around their family more, they "wouldn't say they got closer, they got farther apart" due to "a lot of falling outs, because they were with each other for too long" this resulted in them choosing to spend time in their room because they "just didn't want to see my family sometimes", the proximity was overwhelming and they often felt that despite having their family there, they "just needed someone else to talk to". One of the young people spoke about their longing to see their grandmother who lived in a different country during the pandemic, saying "I couldn't go over to her place when I couldn't handle my family". Alluding to the exclusion of youth from outlets that they once relied on for respite and comfort. It seems that many of the youth who took part dealt with struggles due to the close proximity to their family, which brought difficult interpersonal issues on top of an already stressful personal environment. Additionally, the constant presence of family left little room for the kind of independence youth usually find through social activities, school and activities outside of the family home, leaving youth without space of their own outside of their own bedrooms.

## **"I was in a state of oblivion where I would just lay in bed all day" - Mental health**

Many of the youth who told their stories shared their perspectives on mental health. For some their struggles manifested in terms of lack of motivation, for others it was boredom, and many saw their mental health fall drastically during lockdown. One person shared their experiences of lack of motivation, and how that left them in "a state of oblivion where I would just lay in bed all day". The same topic of lying in bed and mindlessly scrolling on social media was echoed by other storytellers, with one adding that life became "boring and monotone." These struggles were also felt by other youth, with one saying "my mental health was terrible, it definitely took a downwards spiral. I was not happy at all," due to the lack of social interaction and the outlets for self-expression that were denied during the pandemic. Another reason for a negative impact on youth's mental health due to the pandemic was not having friends to talk to. A storyteller shared that "I would say that being home all the time affected my mental health because I didn't have my friends to talk to", despite having their family around they "needed people other than my family to talk to" affirming the importance of youth having their own independence and autonomy outside of their family home. While this was an extremely challenging struggle for some, there were, on the other hand, youth who used the extra time during the pandemic to work on their mental health, with one sharing "I was very depressed before the pandemic" but that they were able to take time for themselves, to "be able to relax and rest for a period of time" and another person who said that they "had more time to work on [their] mental health". The pandemic also provided time for other storytellers to pursue activities that they enjoyed, one storyteller said "I started going for walks that lasted hours and reading books" and others talked about the positive experience of how they enjoyed playing video games and getting better at them.

Overall, the pandemic impacted a majority of the young storytellers in terms of their general sense of boredom, and their motivation for doing things they did pre-covid dropped, for others their mental health was positively impacted by the extra time to focus on themselves and to do what made them happy without the pressures of normal life. The differences in these two scenarios are to be expected, as mental health is a spectrum that can be influenced by a variety of factors. In this case, factors such as allowing youth to have more time to focus on their own

mental health, and ensuring that youth have their needs met in terms of motivation, engagement, and protecting them from the impact of isolation are all extremely important.

## **Key findings**

Overall, it seems that the unstructured nature of online learning caused difficulties for youth with motivating themselves, an understandable consequence of going from a system in which accountability is integrated through physical presence to one in which the mute button exists, which results in the unfortunate consequence of many high-school level teenagers losing interest in and falling behind in classes. When it comes to social lives, many young people felt a distance from their friends that was not fulfilled, and in many cases was made worse, by the proximity of their family members, when constantly being around each other resulted in strained relationships and a lack of independence. In many cases, the lockdown had considerable impacts on the mental health of the younger generation, where social isolation and a lack of motivation to do anything besides lying in bed and scrolling on social media resulted in a state of "oblivion". For others, lockdowns provided much-needed room for self-reflection and time to pursue their own interests. These experiences show that, once society is back up and running, the experiences of youth need to be taken into account. The benefits of engagement in education, independence and autonomy from the family home, time to focus on their own interests outside of school, and a vibrant social life in which they are allowed to experience normal teenage milestones cannot be understated and should be taken into account.



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This insight report has been produced by CROSSING BORDERS and is based on 17 young people living in DENMARK. 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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**“THIS VIRUS COME TO CONDITION  
OUR REALITY. NOWADAYS WE CAN'T  
BE DOING WHAT WE LIKE THE  
MOST.”**

PORTUGUESE YOUNG WOMEN'S VISIONS ABOUT THE COVID-19  
PANDEMIC, LOCKDOWNS AND THE FUTURE

INSIGHT REPORT

## Introduction

On 10th November 2021, FAJDP has carry out our story curation activities with a group of young women who had already participated with us to gather and tell their stories of lived experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This activity took place in FAJDP House of Associations and the group came from a School from Matosinhos (a city near to Porto), where they are studying Social Cultural Animation.

All participants – 12 in total – are girls and aged between 17 and 19 years old.

### **“When the first [COVID-19] news came, we relativised. And we didn’t think it would be such a serious thing.” – The initial impacts of the pandemic**

As with many people around the world, these young women were surprised by the first news about this virus. And, as many of us, they didn't think this was something to really consider as a part in our daily lives.

The fear of the unknown was a common feeling among them, but it took a while until they completely realized how complex the situation was. Getting used to the face masks, social distancing and hygienic rules was their new reality and they were a little afraid they couldn't keep up with school classes over distance.

Some of the young people had said that in the beginning they felt it was something going on far away in China and so it didn't really affect them in Portugal. When they realized the severity of what was going on and the need for lockdowns, they acknowledged how the world is all connected and how local, small actions can have an impact worldwide.

### **“During our lives, we always listen that was important to be with other people and sharing things with them.” – Changes to day-to-day life**

In Portugal it is very common to hug and give two kisses to the face when we meet someone, as a part of our cultural heritage. Parents, family, and society in general

always encouraging their teenagers to be out, away from electronic devices – really connecting with each other's. Large family dinners and going out with friends, for example, was common and regular stuffs in these young people's lives. Lockdown, then, signalled some big changes to day-to-day life in Portugal.

All of them had spoken about how they felt during the lockdowns – how hard it was for them. Some had referenced how different (and sad) their summer vacations, Xmas, and other holidays were. Until that point of their lives, family and educators strongly advise them to be close to people and share a hug, for example. And since March 2020, the rules have completely changed.

This is a group who really like their school, teachers, and colleagues. So, for them it was difficult to be lock at home, far away from their friends and relatives. Social media and classes through Teams or Zoom were their new reality and a way to be with others, but for them was not enough, was not the same.

### **“My father had already gotten the vaccine a week ago and he got it anyway.” – Living with COVID-19**

Some young women from this group had experience of living with the virus at home – because relatives had got infected or they had even caught it themselves. For those girls, the lockdown was even more stressful because they had to live aside from the rest of the family.

They talked about how the routines changed at home – meals were served in isolation, hygienic rules became even stricter – and how they felt obliged to stay in their room as much as possible: “routines had changed, when we sleep, meals were served in the bedroom, and I was always lock in my bedroom” said one of them. Other girl had mention it was hard because she couldn't be with their parents, and she ended: “I don't want to live that again; I hated the experience”.

All of them were very happy with the arrival of the vaccine, but they recognize that, despite this, it is necessary to continue to be careful - “it doesn't just happen to others”, some mentioned. And when it happens, it could be very dangerous to your safety and health.

## **“To have fun without rules, without anything...” - Life post-COVID**

Like most people, these girls miss their lives before COVID-19. These are young, adolescent girls who gave a lot of importance to their relationships with friends, who started to get out at night during weekends and had their first romantic relationships.

Most of them had mention how hard it is to live in this new reality and all of them want to have fun and do regular stuff without thinking about hygiene or social distancing rules. So, they often related how anxious they are and how they miss those old times when they could do their activities without thinking that much. Some of them had shared how they were sad about getting locked down at home and how, simultaneously, they were scared to get out when it was possible.

However, they also realize how this lockdown experience had given them the opportunity to really engage with their closest family, at home. They had connected on another level with their siblings and parents, even though that means to be away from other relatives such as grandparents.

### **Key findings**

- **Being Connected:** Internet access was very important to keep in touch with their friends and to attend school classes. Although the internet was something available and easy to use, they were afraid their school grades and the learning process in general was harmed.
- **Self-Reflections:** In these two years, they realized how fragile life can be, how things could change very quickly and how we are all connected – one's actions have impact in others lives, and everybody should look for each other.
- **Dualities:** On one hand, they were sad to be at home, without social events, friends, or school. But, when the lockdowns ended, they were afraid to be again around other people. Also, they appreciate the time at home with their close family, although they miss other distant relatives.
- **Group Empathy:** During this workshop, girls had shared stories and realities that not everyone in the group were totally aware of. Sharing that reality made them understand better what everyone went through that period and create a better, more cohesive and understanding group.

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