

# BEYOND LOCKDOWN

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THE  
'PANDEMIC  
SCAR'

ON  
YOUNG  
PEOPLE

The **social, economic**  
and **mental health**  
impact of **COVID-19**  
on **young people** in **Europe**

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# Acknowledgements

This report was produced by People Dialogue and Change and commissioned by the European Youth Forum.

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## About People Dialogue and Change

People Dialogue and Change is a values driven company that specialises in supporting organisations to develop their approach to youth participation and youth engagement. We work with organisations in the public, voluntary and academic sector to provide research, evaluation, consultancy and capacity building services, across Europe and beyond.

## About the European Youth Forum

The European Youth Forum is the platform of youth organisations in Europe. We represent over 100 youth organisations, which bring together tens of millions of young people from all over Europe.

## Acknowledgements

The research team would like to thank the following people for their support with the project:

### All of the research participants

Asociația "Ghi Lacho" Hunedoara  
Cansu Yılmaz & Asuman Tongarlık - Uluslararası Gençlik Dayanışma Derneği  
Deutscher Bundesjugendring  
ERGO Network  
European Disability Forum  
European Patient Forum  
European Platform on Multiple Sclerosis  
European Trade Union Confederation Youth  
Europe Youth Forum Board and Secretariat  
Jonas Bausch, Drew Gardiner, and Susana Puerto - International Labour Organisation  
Mladi +  
Musa Akgül  
Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions  
Rural Youth Europe

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**To cite this work:** Moxon, D., Bacalso, C. and Şerban, A (2021), Beyond the pandemic: The impact of COVID-19 on young people in Europe. Brussels. European Youth Forum

### With the support of:

The European Commission

The European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



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# Executive summary

The end of the pandemic may now be in sight, at least in some parts of the world. But its effects on young people will last well beyond it. This research aims to analyse and identify the youth-specific medium and long-term impacts of COVID-19 in Europe, and gaps in the response of institutions and national governments. It demonstrates that further policy measures are now needed to address the long-term consequences of the pandemic on young people's education, work and mental health. The three areas of educational loss, economic loss and poor mental health now form a long-term 'pandemic scar' on young people. This may follow young people for the rest of their lives, and requires governments and institutions to act today to deliver a youth-inclusive recovery.

Whilst the pandemic has been challenging for all, compared to many other social groups, young people have been disproportionately impacted upon by the pandemic (ILO, 18 March 2020). The closure of educational institutions, and economic consequences of the pandemic have already had a substantial impact on young people's lives. This all comes in addition to the legacy of the 2008 financial and economic crisis and the subsequent austerity measures implemented by the EU (European Union) and its Member States, which left one in four young people at risk of poverty and social exclusion (Eurostat 2021a).

The results of the research show an already identifiable impact on young people's work opportunities, income, educational outcomes and mental health. These are interconnected and are likely to exacerbate one another over time. The research demonstrates that so far, young workers have experienced considerable loss of work and income as a result of unemployment and reduction in working hours. Students have experienced significant loss of learning, and the quality of remote education has been variable. The overall impact of the pandemic on young people's social and economic rights has also contributed to widespread issues in young people's mental health and wellbeing. The results identify that nearly two-thirds of young people in Europe may now be affected by depression or anxiety. Young people from marginalised backgrounds are more severely affected in nearly all areas. Drawing on previous research it can also be predicted that these combined impacts may affect young people's lives well beyond the end of the pandemic and any 'return to normal.'

The review of national policy response within this work argues that, so far, there has been little policy focus on limiting the long-term impact on young people and their rights. Whilst broader economic measures are in place, it is not clear how much these will effectively address or reach young people. Educational measures have focused on school closures without fully addressing the educational impact of this. There are almost no identifiable national policy responses to supporting young people's mental health either currently or moving forward.

To reduce the long-term consequences for young people of the pandemic it is now imperative that policy-makers:

- Develop recovery plans which fully address long-term impacts of the pandemic on young people. These require a strong intersectional dimension to ensure that they adequately address the situation of different groups of youth, and the full participation of young people and youth organisations.
- Strengthen and invest in job creation schemes that enable quality jobs for young people. Particular attention should be paid to ensuring full labour rights and protections of all young people, and outreach initiatives that target those young people who are most marginalised.
- Improve the quality and accessibility of digital tools used within remote and digital education and provide additional catch-up support for those who have lost learning through the pandemic. Improving successful transition from education to employment is imperative, particularly for those leaving education in the coming years.
- Increase access to mental health and wellbeing support for young people. The support needs to recognise the link between socio-economic factors and mental health, by providing a non-medical safety net and first point of access. This should be delivered through a range of settings such as schools, non-formal education providers, youth organisations and online.

Without measures such as these it is clear that the pandemic will have lasting effects on young people's inclusion and youth rights. A youth-inclusive recovery is now crucial for a group that has still not fully recovered from the 2008 financial and economic crisis.

# Introduction

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), young people are among the groups who will be disproportionately affected by the current pandemic in both the short and long term (ILO, 18 March 2020). This raises deep concerns given that, even before the pandemic, young people in Europe were already facing significant challenges in relation to employment and social inclusion. In the EU over one in every four young people were already at risk of poverty and social exclusion (Eurostat 2021a). Youth unemployment was double the overall unemployment rate. Non-standard forms of work and in-work poverty were on the rise among youth and transitions from education to employment were challenging as young people seemed to be caught in a cycle of internships, temporary or unpaid work. These challenges to young people's financial security were exacerbated by the fact that age-based discrimination and eligibility requirements in social protection mechanisms often exclude youth. Many of these challenges were a legacy of the 2008 financial and economic crisis and the subsequent austerity measures implemented by the EU and its Member States.

Unfortunately, these existing risks and challenges have only been multiplied during the pandemic. The research outlined in this report aimed to analyse and identify the youth-specific medium and long-term impacts of COVID-19 in Europe and to identify promising practices as well as gaps in the response of institutions and national governments. Recognising that youth are not a homogenous group, the study also aims to provide greater analysis on the situation and needs of specific vulnerable and marginalised groups of young people.

The research was carried out by People Dialogue and Change and commissioned by the European Youth Forum. The report is organised into three thematic areas, based on the findings:

- Impact on young people's work and income,
- Impact on young people's education and learning,
- Impact on young people's mental health and wellbeing.

These are then followed by a set of conclusions and policy recommendations.

The findings themselves are based on:

- A secondary analysis of data from the Decent Jobs for Youth: Global Survey 2020 on Youth & COVID-19. (ILO, 18 March 2020)
- A series of participatory focus groups and interviews with young people in marginalised situations from across Europe.
- A literature review of national policy responses to COVID-19.
- A policy co-production workshop with youth organisations, NGOs and young people.

These findings highlight the deep social, economic, but also mental health challenges and barriers young people are facing as a result of the current crisis. Looking at the progression of the situation of young people over the year since the pandemic began, it demonstrates the need for a youth-inclusive recovery. National governments and institutions must prioritise youth through social investment and employment policies that go beyond addressing immediate needs, and that are more forward-looking, and rights-based, in order to tackle the long-term impacts that young people will face. This is the only way to ensure that the 'pandemic scar' is not one that young people carry for the rest of their lives.

# How was this study carried out?

## **A secondary analysis of data from the Decent Jobs for Youth: Global Survey 2020 on Youth & COVID-19** (Survey collected April-May 2020)

The original survey was undertaken as part of a partnership between the European Youth Forum, the International Labour Organisation, the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, AIESEC, the United Nations Major Group on Children and Youth, and the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa.

For this research, data from the survey was re-analysed to produce results based solely on the 4,450, 18–34 year olds living in one of 32 European countries, who took part.

Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The Czech Republic, The Netherlands, The Republic of Moldova, The Ukraine, The United Kingdom, Turkey,

The original survey was known to contain biases towards more highly educated, urban and suburban young people. So, a subcategory of 'young people in marginalised situations' was created from within the group above. This contained the 1,358 respondents who identified as:

Part of ethnic, religious or other minority group, migrant, refugee, asylum seeker or displaced person, person with a disability/disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex or, living in a rural area.

The analysis adjusted for differences in gender, country population by age. Further details are in the appendix.

## **A literature review of national policy responses to COVID-19** (February 2021)

Throughout the pandemic a series of international organisations such as the International Monetary Fund, Eurofound, the ILO and the EU-CoE Youth Partnership have been tracking and publishing national policy responses to COVID-19. In addition, organisations like the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and United Nations have undertaken ad-hoc reviews and research.

The data published by these organisations on European countries was reviewed by the research team to identify policy responses which were youth specific and addressed the emerging findings of the research. Full sources are listed in the appendix.

## **Participatory focus groups and interviews with young people in marginalised situations** (February–March 2021)

Participatory focus groups and interviews were held with 25 young people in marginalised situations from across Europe.

During interviews and focus groups participants were asked to explore the data from the survey. They used this as a starting point to make connections to their own experiences and those of their communities. One focus group was held in person, socially distanced, the rest took place over video or phone.

The young people who took part identified as one or more of the following:

- Young people with chronic illness
- Young people with disabilities
- Young migrants/refugees
- Young people in precarious employment situations
- Young Roma
- Young people from ethnic or religious minority backgrounds
- Young people in rural areas
- Non-binary gender/transgender

Participants were from: Croatia (2), Finland (1), Ireland (1), Romania (8), Serbia (1), Slovenia (5), Sweden (3), Spain (1), The United Kingdom (2) Turkey (2).

## **A policy co-production workshop with youth organisations, NGOs and young people** (May 2021)

To develop the policy recommendations in this research a co-production workshop was held with:

- Focus group participants,
- Non-governmental organisations working with marginalised young people,
- European Youth Forum Member Organisations,
- European Youth Forum Secretariat and Board,
- The research team.

Fourteen people took part in total. Participants were presented with the findings of the research and asked to identify potential policy solutions. These ideas were then developed into full policy recommendations by the research team and the European Youth Forum Secretariat.



# 1 in 5

Nearly one in five young people who are not in education, employment or training experience discrimination when looking for work.



## Marginalised

Young people in marginalised situations were more than twice as likely to have stopped working than other young people.



# Half

Half of young people who are not in education, employment or training say a barrier to work is that jobs are only being given to people who have good connections.

## Learning significantly less

Around three-quarters of students in marginalised situations believed that they were learning significantly less or slightly less as a result of the pandemic.



# The impact on: Young people's work and income

## TLDR\*;

Young people have experienced substantial loss of work and income during the pandemic as a result of unemployment and reduction in working hours.

Young people in marginalised situations are twice as likely to be affected by job loss.

Nearly half of young people who are not in education, employment and training are not aware of government support measures available to them.

Young people feel they need to give up on career aspirations and accept poor employment conditions in order to have a better chance of employment.

Work uncertainty and instability is a source of unhappiness and stress for many young people.

The current loss of work may also have long-term 'scarring' effects on young people's employment opportunities and life chances.

Policy responses targeted specifically at economic situations were identified in only seven European countries, although wider economic responses may still benefit young people. Based on the policy review, Portugal is a standout exception.

*(\*too long, didn't read)*

## Loss of work and employment

An increase in unemployment and loss of work has been one of the major impacts of COVID-19 on young people. As of March 2021, 2.951 million young people under 25 in the EU were unemployed (Eurostat 2021b). Since the onset of the pandemic, it is estimated the youth unemployment rate in the EU has risen from 14.9% to 17.1%<sup>1</sup> (Eurostat 2021b). Youth Unemployment in the rest of Europe is no better. Globally, the ILO (2021) estimates that by January 2021, young people (15-25) had experienced an employment loss of 8.7%, compared to only 3.7% for adults.

These figures come on top of an already challenging labour market situation for young people. Before the pandemic young people were still suffering the effects of the 2008 financial and economic crisis, with generally high youth unemployment, difficult and complex transition from school to work (Eurostat 2015). Perhaps unsurprisingly then, one in two (49.8%) young people in the survey saw their future career prospects with uncertainty, and more than one in 10 (16.0%) saw them with fear.

However, within the pandemic, official state youth unemployment figures may mask the true situation of young people's loss in work. Youth employment figures count those who lost their job and are seeking alternative work. By contrast, a substantial amount of work loss for young people has occurred when their work hours have been reduced to zero, but they have still retained their employment contacts (ILO 2021). Importantly, official unemployment statistics are not revealing the true extent of the impact of the pandemic as they only record those who are out of work and actively looking for a job. Analysis elsewhere has found that in the EU the number of people available for but not seeking work increased by 3.2 million in the first half of 2020, which represents 86% of the total decline in the labour force as measured by the Labour Force Survey (European Central Bank 2020). Apparent decreases in the unemployment rate in some EU Member States during COVID-19 has been attributed by the OECD not to a rise in employment, but large numbers of people transitioning into 'inactivity' (OECD 2020a).

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**Young people in marginalised situations were more than twice as likely to have stopped working than other young people.**

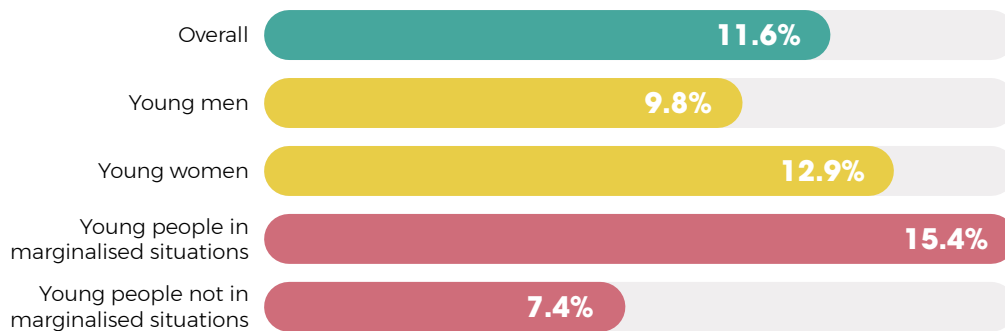
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<sup>1</sup> Seasonally adjusted youth (under 25s) unemployment, between March 2020 and March 2021



In the survey, 11.6% of respondents indicated they had stopped working, either as a result of job losses, or having their working hours reduced to zero. The number of young workers who reported their daily working hours per day as zero increased by 3.7% when compared to their hours before the pandemic. Young people in marginalised situations were more than twice as likely to have stopped working. 15.4% reported themselves as having stopped working, compared to 7.4% for non-marginalised young people. Young women were also more severely affected. 12.9% of young women reported having stopped working compared to 9.8% of young men.

## Proportion of survey respondents who have stopped working since the start of the pandemic

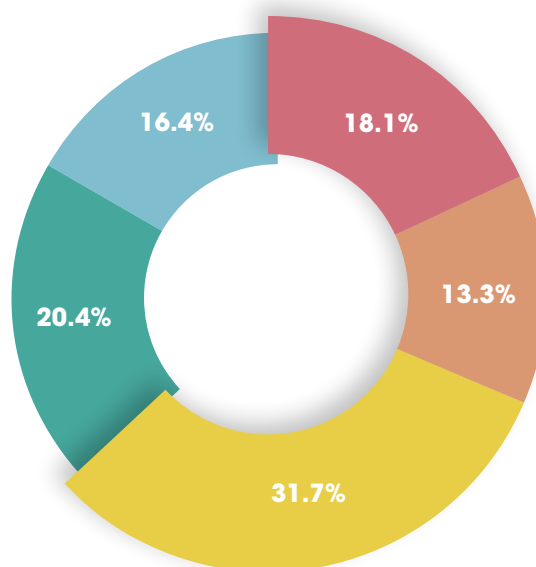


## Young people who are not in education employment and training

### Why did you leave your last job?

Young people not in education employment or training

- The business closed
- I was let go
- It was a temporary job that ended
- I resigned
- I moved

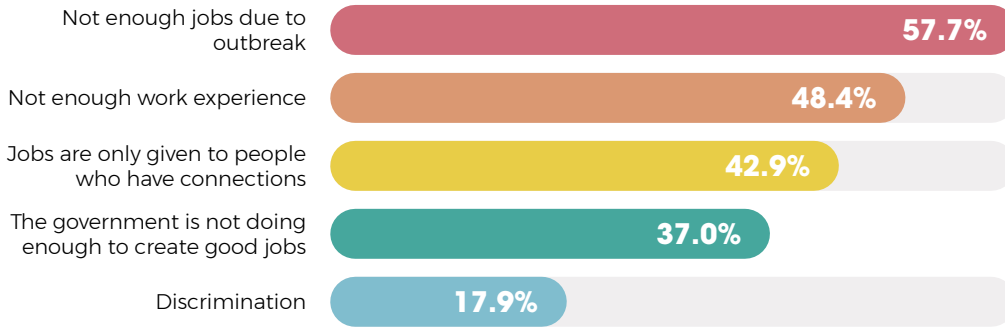


Whilst some young people will have stopped working through their own choice (for instance, to move to education) this does not appear to be the case for most who lost jobs. Just under two-thirds (63.4%) of the survey respondents that were not in education employment or training indicated they had left work for reasons beyond their control. Business closing and temporary jobs ended were the most common reasons for leaving work.

The most common barrier to finding a new job, identified by young people who were not in education, employment or training was 'not enough jobs due to the outbreak.' However, the wide range of barriers experienced shows a jobs market that is far from transparent and fair for young people. Nearly one in five experienced discrimination, and just under half said that jobs were only given to people who have good connections.

## What obstacles do you face finding work?

Young people not in education employment or training



Worryingly, nearly half (49.0%) of young people who were not in education, employment or training said they were not aware of the support services offered by the government to help them find a job. Less than one in four (22.7%) young people who were not in education, employment or education reported receiving income support such as unemployment payments or cash transfers.

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**Nearly one in five young people who are not in education, employment or training experience discrimination when looking for work.**

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**Half of young people who are not in education, employment or training say a barrier to work is that jobs are only being given to people who have good connections.**

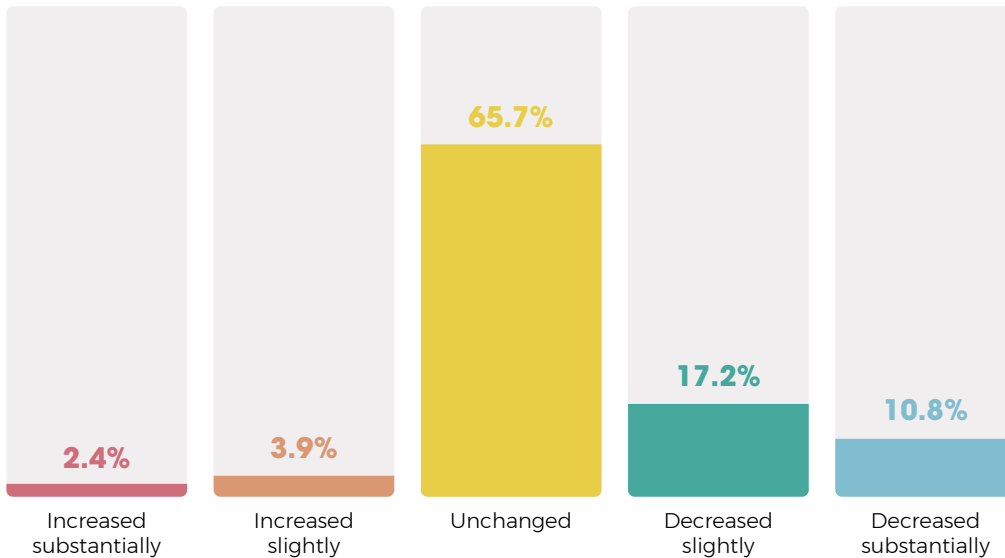
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# Income loss

Income loss is also a part of the impact of COVID-19 on young people. Alongside those young people who have experienced job losses, there has also been loss of income to those who are still in work. In the survey, more than one in four (28.0%) young workers indicated their income had decreased or decreased substantially since the onset of the pandemic. This figure was higher amongst young people in marginalised situations (31.6%) but comparable between young men (28.0%) and young women (28.1%).

## Since the start of the coronavirus outbreak, how has your income changed?

Young Workers



This income loss may be linked to a reduction in working hours. The average loss in working hours per day amongst young workers in the survey was one hour and 25 minutes. This represents a reduction of around one-fifth of the average hours worked. For young people in marginalised situations this loss in hours increased to just under two hours per day.

Income loss amongst young workers is concerning given that they already tend to be paid lower wages than other age groups. More than one in four young people are minimum wage earners, compared to one in 10 adults (European Commission 2020). Moreover, some European countries exclude young people from the national minimum wage by setting a lower youth minimum wage.<sup>2</sup> This may thus result in young people suffering from income loss being at greater risk of poverty.

<sup>2</sup> In the EU, these include: Belgium, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta and the Netherlands.

## Messages from young people in the interviews and focus groups

Around one year on from the survey, most young people in the focus groups and interviews confirmed that the bleak picture painted by the statistics still reflected their experiences. Many young people shared that their income had declined due to the pandemic and many others had lost jobs. Job and income loss was not experienced by everyone in the focus groups, however. Those connected to agriculture, manual labouring and healthcare identified that their experience was the opposite of statistical data. Young people working in these areas highlighted that they had been 'busier than ever' and had not suffered loss of work.

Focus groups and interviews on their own are not sufficient to show trends between employment sectors. However, the range of experiences reported is supported by wider data. Globally, employment sectors such as agriculture, health and social care, and education have experienced fewer job losses than sectors such as accommodation, food and retail (ILO, 29 April 2020). Young people are also more commonly employed in some of the most highly affected sectors (ILO, 27 May 2020). This illustrates how regions where young people are commonly employed in the highly affected sectors may experience greater impacts on youth. Examples could be tourist destinations where youth employment is within accommodation and food sectors with a high degree of seasonal work.

**“Students were the first to get fired, because the owners were more keen on firing young people than those who are in higher functions, management.”**

Young research participant

For some young people in the focus groups and interviews there was surprise that the employment figures and data were not worse. Many reported that their social circles were highly concerned about the effect of COVID-19 on work and income. They highlighted that lost jobs and limited financial help over time were considered a common experience within their friendship groups. As a result, there was a widespread negativity and pessimism about the economic situation young people were in. The emotional impact arising from the rapid economic changes young people are experiencing is a significant part of the impact on them. To some extent the perceptions of the economic impact of COVID-19, and the stress created by this, may play as much of a role as economic realities.

Overall, there was a high degree of concern, uncertainty, unhappiness, and stress expressed about work and employment prospects. There was a general belief that young people's job situations had gone from bad to worse. Those young people who had recently left, or were about to leave, education were exceptionally concerned about finding their first job. It was felt that this was an important step that 'sets you up better in the long run.' Those who were trying to take this step were concerned that the pandemic made it almost impossible to do so.

This fear and uncertainty around work was said to lead to a willingness to accept poor quality work and poor quality work conditions. Young people in the study were concerned about being asked to reduce their work conditions or take temporary or more precarious contracts. They felt they had no choice over this, as poor conditions were preferable to losing work or having no work. The fear that a loss of conditions may occur, was equally as concerning to them as the reality of a change in circumstances. This was particularly challenging for those with chronic health conditions who needed stable employment and access to sick leave. Having to reduce working conditions or take precarious contracts to maintain employment has been an increasing concern for young people since the 2008 crisis. This highlights the importance of a recovery response focused on ensuring quality jobs for youth.

**“I was afraid about my career before the pandemic ... now it’s even harder. I have a job for 50% (of my time). My big fear is that if they want to extend my contract, I cannot say no, or if I can state what I wish to be improved. If I say no to this, I’m not sure if I can get anything else.”**

Young research participant who works half time hours to manage health concerns

**“You can’t be sick – you have to go, it’s (my employer’s) business, if you don’t go in it won’t get done.”**

Young research participant

Some young people, particularly those with university qualifications, described the sadness of giving up on their career goals and aspirations. Accepting you were unlikely to find a job that you had trained for and that your ‘dream job’ would not materialise were a significant source of unhappiness. This was often discussed as having to make a choice between stability and aspiration or hope. The lack of opportunity meant giving up on career goals and hopes for the future. This highlights how personal aspirations are a fundamental part of what makes a job a quality experience and must play a part in activation policies. Young people should not feel pressured to take on poor quality work that does not reflect their skills or aspirations.

**“The jobs are not the ones that you studied for. You have to lower your standards.”**

Young research participant

**“Maybe I shouldn’t focus on my dream job anymore. I have to focus on a job that will give me money to live.”**

Young research participant

Some young people, particularly young Roma or young people with an immigrant heritage described being unaware of any government support available to them. Many were surprised by the statistic that only half of young people who were not in education, employment or training knew about government support. They felt this was too high. They said it would be unlikely that this many young people in their communities would have access to support, even before the pandemic. Several expressed the belief that if you lived in a ‘rich, white neighbourhood’ you would be more likely to know about the support. By contrast they felt that young people in minority communities, such as their own, did not have anyone around them who was able to share information about support schemes.

Across the focus groups and interviews these feelings of lack of support, going from ‘bad to worse,’ giving up on ‘dream jobs’ and unequal access contributed to lack of trust in the state. Several young people expressed being frustrated with politicians for treating lack of work as something caused by the individual rather than wider social and economic issues. That they were tired of being told the reason for their poor employment opportunities was their personal ‘lack of skills’ or because they were ‘not trying hard enough.’

**“Lots of young people don’t trust that there are any support services after nine years of (the current government).”**

Young research participant

## What are the possible long-term effects?

Loss of work and income are immediate impacts of COVID-19 that young people are already experiencing. However, there may also be even longer-term impacts that happen as a consequence of the unemployment, underemployment<sup>3</sup> and loss of work that occurs during the pandemic.

High unemployment rates have the potential to increase young people's risk of long-term unemployment, exclusion from the labour market and society generally as they grow older. It is widely argued that youth unemployment can result in a 'scarring effect' that affects young people later in life. Young people in this situation experience periods of inactivity through which they are unable to build up vital social capital and work experience (Eurofound 2012). It is argued this can result in lower pay over the life course, increased likelihood of becoming unemployed again, and reduced life chances (e.g. De Fraja et al. 2019; Branch and Bellflower 2011; Burgess et al. 2003). This may also lead to insufficient pension contribution over the long term (Eurofound 2012).

There is also evidence that the effect of graduating from education into a poor economy results in similar negative labour market effects that are 'large, negative and persistent' (Kahn 2010). A particular issue is that recent graduates experience higher competition for fewer jobs, making the transition from education to employment exceptionally challenging. Those who are underemployed can also expect to experience negative long-term economic consequences, as well as a long-term negative impact on their health and wellbeing (Friedland and Price 2003; Wilkins 2007).

It is not possible to be certain of the exact long-term impact the pandemic will have on young people's work opportunities, particularly around the true scale. The scale will be affected by the length of the pandemic and the speed of the economic recovery afterwards. However, the overwhelming message is clear: young people have already experienced significant negative effects during the pandemic. These effects are now very likely to lead to longer-term negative consequences in their economic and employment situations in future and therefore requires adequate policy responses today.

## What has been the policy-maker's response so far?

Government responses to stimulating the economy and supporting enterprises, jobs and incomes are being implemented and are evolving rapidly (ILO, 29 April 2020). However, they are not aimed specifically at young people. There is also limited evidence or assessment by state parties of the extent to which wider economic measures are working effectively for young people. A Eurofound study of unemployed people of all ages in the EU-27 identified that well over half of people did not receive any official financial support since the outbreak of COVID-19 (Eurofound 2020a). There is no reason to assume that the situation would be better for young people.

Across Europe there does not appear to have been widespread attempts to address the economic impact of the pandemic specifically on young people. The Eurofound COVID-19 Policy Watch database indicates only 12 of 1,283 policy measures identified across the EU-27 countries and the UK target young people (Eurofound, n.d.). Policy measures targeted at specific social groups are much less common than initiatives targeting occupational groups (like the self-employed). However, youth still had fewer national policy measures targeted at them than any other social group such as parents (19), children (16), or older citizens (20), despite being one of the groups most affected by the pandemic.

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**Only 12 of 1,283 national economic policy responses across the EU-27 and the UK have been targeted at young people.**

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<sup>3</sup> Having fewer hours, or lower status work than you wish.

At the time of the policy review (February 2021), only eight European countries had identifiable employment and economic measures targeted specifically at young people, and only five of these were substantive. It is important to stress that more could exist. The speed of the policy response required by the pandemic, coupled with the fact that mapping of policies occurs retrospectively, limits the available data. There may well be initiatives that are unmapped and unreported to the various policy hubs included in the review. Nevertheless, it is clear that youth-specific responses are not widespread.

Research by the European Trade Union institute into changes made to social protection systems by EU Member States during the pandemic showed that the majority have made income support measures such as unemployment benefits more accessible, particularly by increasing their value, relaxing eligibility conditions and extending their duration (ETUI 2021). Whilst these measures do not specifically target youth, they will help support young people who are more likely to be unemployed and are often excluded from social protection such as unemployment benefits due to a lack of work history. However, the findings also show that all of the changes made are temporary, with many already having come to an end, leaving young people once again faced with a social protection gap. It is vital that policy-makers focus on building back better by ensuring young people are equally covered by social protection, instead of going back to normal. Addressing these gaps would ensure that young people are protected from poverty but also from any future labour market shocks.

Whilst the EU Youth Guarantee has shown some important gaps in terms of quality and outreach over the years, the updated Recommendation is a chance to address these at a particularly critical time for youth. Despite its adoption in 2020, however, it is still unclear to what extent EU Member States have taken concrete steps to adopt new Implementation Plans that would reflect the reinforcement and increase the impact of the Youth Guarantee.

Additionally, whilst young people are identified as a key priority under recovery funds such as Next Generation EU and the Recovery and Resilience Facility, there has been a serious lack of involvement of young people and youth organisations in consultation on how the funds will be invested at national level. This may affect the actual level of investment into youth-specific measures and their effectiveness.

It is essential that delays in the implementation of the Reinforced Youth Guarantee are addressed, and an adequate level of investment in youth through the recovery funds is ensured. These are necessary steps that would have a significant positive role in addressing the impacts of the pandemic on young people.

# Youth-focused economic policy responses to the pandemic

**Iceland** is aiming to create 3,000 temporary summer jobs for students aged 18 and over and to provide support for summer schools. (ILO, n.d.)

**Sweden** has created grants worth a total of €17 million for municipalities to create summer jobs for young people and to fund green jobs. (ILO, n.d.)

**Lithuania** has offered subsidies to make workplaces accessible to disabled people under 29. (Eurofound 2020b)

**The Russian Federation** has worked on expanding access to paid sick leave, including young workers. (ILO, n.d.)

**Portugal's** ATIVAR. PT programme has developed financial support measures to incentivise businesses to hire young unemployed people. There are also incentives to create internships to support integration of young workers in the labour market and the vocational conversion of unemployed and inactive workers. The scheme also incentivises the creation of permanent contracts, job creation in inland territories and top up for vulnerable workers. It sits alongside the 'Jovem+Digital' programme, which develops digital skills in young people. (ILO, n.d.)

**The Netherlands** has developed a national social package worth €1.4 billion. A significant part of the package is focused on youth unemployment and preventing school leaver drop out by encouraging young people to extend their education. (ILO, n.d.)

**Cyprus** has developed incentive schemes for hiring of unemployed people and for recruitment, occupational rehabilitation, employment of young people and training of young people. (ILO, n.d.)

**Turkey** is prioritising young people in a scheme donating public land to farmers. (ILO, n.d.)

Overall, economic policy responses have reflected historic divides in policy-making relating to young people. They show the limited extent to which youth policy occurs as cross-sectoral policy and the low priority of youth in mainstream economic policy. The general lack of youth-focused initiatives identified by economic and employment policy trackers such as the IMF (n.d.), ILO (n.d.) and Eurofound (n.d.) highlight that economic policy-makers have given little attention to youth as a dedicated target group. Similarly, youth-focused policy hubs such as the EU-CoE Youth Partnership COVID-19 Knowledge Hub (Council of Europe 2021), show that youth policy-makers have focused on sustaining and adapting youth work, and ignored the economic impact of COVID-19 on young people.



# The impact on: Young people's education and learning

## TLDR\*;

National policy responses have focused on physical closure of schools with quality of education being a secondary consideration.

Quality of remote education has been variable, nearly one in 10 young students are not getting any courses, teaching or testing. Around two-thirds of students believe they are learning 'slightly less' or 'significantly less.'

Three-quarters of marginalised young people believe they may be learning 'slightly less' or 'significantly less.' However, individual circumstances may vary considerably.

Educational uncertainty and challenges of online learning are a source of stress and wellbeing issues for young people.

Although the scale of the impact is not clear, the educational disruption is likely to lead to long-term negative effects in employment, educational outcomes, and health and wellbeing.

There have been few national policy responses focused on limiting the long-term educational impact. The Netherlands is a standout exception.

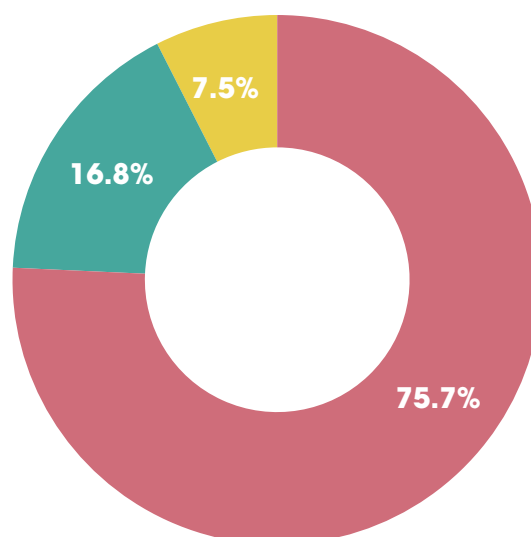
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## Reduced access to education

The closure of schools, colleges, and university<sup>4</sup> premises, and rapid digitisation of formal education, has been one of the most immediate impacts of the pandemic for young people. In the survey, three-quarters of students (75.8%) identified that their school or university had been physically closed. 16.8% said their education was continuing as before, and 7.5% said that their school was still open, but some classes were cancelled.

### Have your studies or training been interrupted since the onset of the outbreak?

- Yes, my school or university premises have been closed
- No we are continuing as before
- Yes, some of my classes have been cancelled, but my school/university premises are open

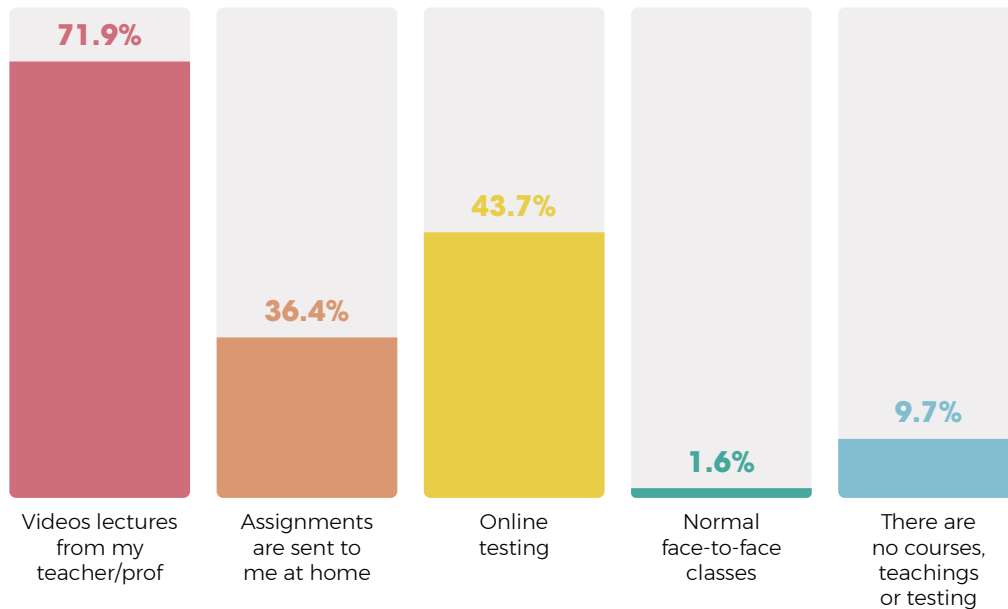


**Nearly one in 10 young students are not getting any courses, teaching or testing.**

<sup>4</sup> For simplicity, this document uses the term school for all types of formal educational institutions.

Remote education has not been delivered in the same way to all young people and many have missed out. Video lectures were the most common way to access education during the pandemic, with just under three-quarters of students (71.9%) receiving these. Just under half were receiving online testing (43.7%) and around one-third (36.4%) said they were having assignments sent home. More concerning, nearly one in 10 (9.7%) young students said they were not getting any courses, teaching or testing. This rises to just under one in six (15.2%) for young people in marginalised situations.

## How are you receiving courses/teachings?

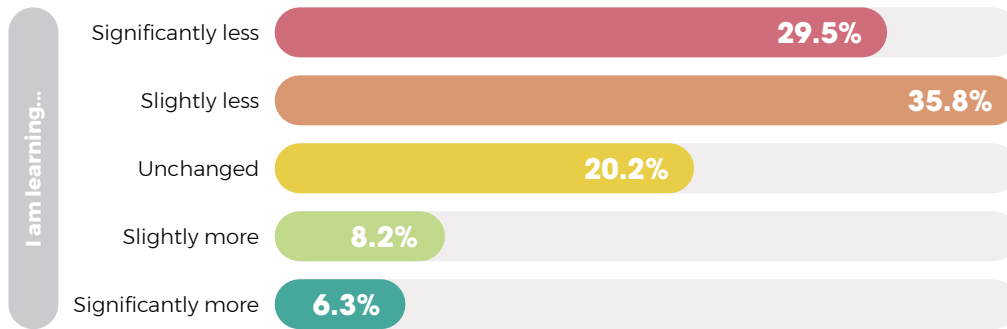


## Loss of learning

The shift to digital learning caused by the pandemic seems to have had negative consequences for students' learning. Around two-thirds of students surveyed (65.3%), indicated they were learning 'significantly less' or 'slightly less' since the start of the pandemic. This loss in learning seems to have been much more substantial for young people in marginalised situations. Here, around three-quarters (73.6%) believed they were learning 'significantly less' or 'slightly less.'

### How has the coronavirus outbreak affected your learning?

All students



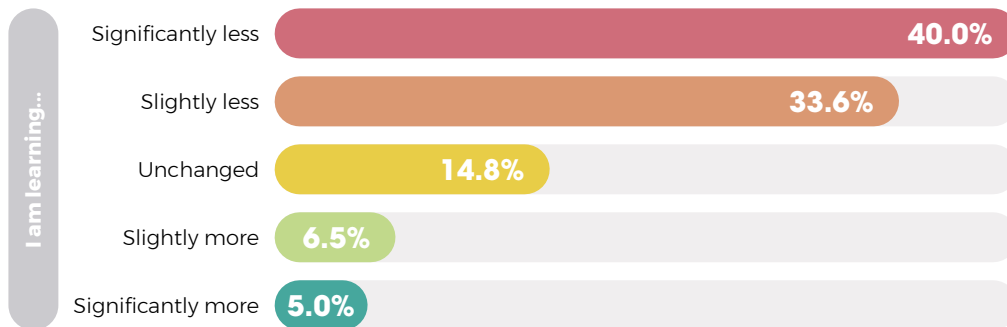
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**One in 10 students think the pandemic will cause them to fail their education.**

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### How has the coronavirus outbreak affected your learning?

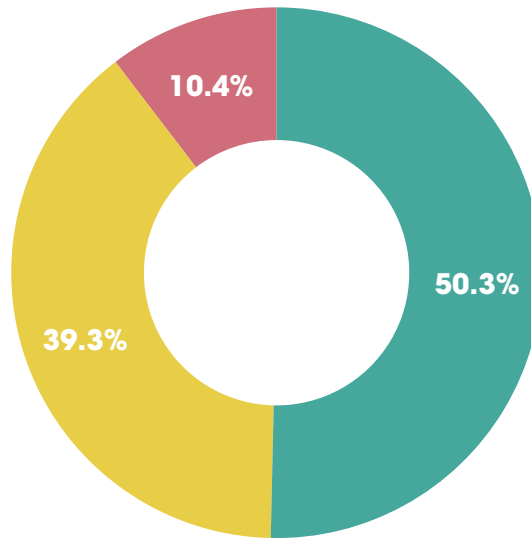
Students in marginalised situations only



The disruption and loss of learning is clearly a source of concern for many young people. A third of students (39.3%) believed the pandemic would delay their education. More concerning, one in 10 students (10.4%) thought the pandemic would cause them to fail their education. Both figures are comparable for young people in marginalised situations and the whole student population.

### Do you think the outbreak will affect the success of your training or studies?

- No, my education is on track
- My education will be delayed
- My education may fail



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**Around three-quarters of students in marginalised situations believed that they were learning significantly less or slightly less as a result of the pandemic.**

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## Messages from young people in the interviews and focus groups

Around one year on from the survey the young people in the focus groups and interviews painted a slightly more positive picture of remote education. Many believed that, as the pandemic progressed, both they and their educational institutions adjusted to the online teaching and the situation had improved. However, it was still considered to be a challenging situation to learn in, and many concerns remained. Supporting the survey findings, participants described how their experience of remote education was very dependent on personal circumstances and the response of their individual educational institutions. Some described how well the school had accommodated their needs, others seem to have little support.

There were a range of experiences and opinions on digital tools. Some young people, particularly young Roma, and young people from immigrant heritage backgrounds, highlighted that digital learning was not accessible for them. The challenge was not about having an internet connection, but about having access to a device that they could use. Many did not have their own laptops or smartphones. These devices were not something that was easily affordable by their families and communities, highlighting the role that existing socio-economic inequalities play in affecting young people's right to education during COVID-19. Other young people, such as those in rural areas or with chronic illness, highlighted that online learning had many advantages for them. Those who had connectivity and a computer but would normally face a long or challenging commute had found many benefits to digital learning. Remote education was helping some young people to manage their health needs more effectively.

**“I left university quite some time ago, but I found, for myself, that I used the time in lockdown to do (remote learning) university modules. Other people I know did the same. People were using other resources to learn new skills. People around here were quite positive and used the time well.”**

Young research participant

**“In the refugee community (in my country) one of the problems is that the people doesn't have enough money. So with everything switched online, families with maybe five children or four children that are in school are hoping on or banking on, your Mum's one phone that she have ... to be able to have access to online education. So that means these young people have to rotate. Today I go online, tomorrow you go online, for me that is not an effective way of education ... and maybe the Mum also needs this phone to work, in order to get money or to get a way of living into the family ... And not just in the refugee centres but in the African communities. Some families their income is by day to day. So the money you Mum makes, this month is what the family is going to eat until it's finished and again next month. So even having access to the internet in the house can be a problem.”**

Young research participant from immigrant heritage and refugee community

Nearly all young people described the accumulation of stress about education over a year with multiple lockdowns. With no end in sight to the pandemic, many said it was hard to find the incentive and energy to focus on their studies. This made learning even harder. Many were concerned about the impact this additional stress was having on their educational results. Challenges finding a quiet place to work and lack of general support from schools around mental health were a contributing factor. There was concern that schools were not taking this into account when assessing students results. Many participants were strongly concerned about how they would cope with the transition from education to employment and the effect that the pandemic would have on their work prospects.

## “Students are really loud about having too much workload, being on screen for lessons ... but they aren't actually heard..”

Young research participant

A particular challenge was faced by young people who had moved away from their parents' home to study, usually at university level. They described how the pandemic had forced them to make difficult choices between returning home to their family or staying in the town or city where their university was. Staying in their university town meant a risk of precarious living situations, as the limited opportunity for student jobs made paying rent difficult. Returning home was felt to be detrimental to learning. It prevented physical access to their educational institutes at the times when classes may run, or to the possibility of using other services such as libraries. The small number of international students in the focus groups highlighted a strong sense of displacement. They had to choose between remaining far away from home and support networks or returning to home countries at the detriment of their education.

When asked to consider the statistic that one in 10 young people were not able to access their education, many participants thought this would likely have lowered as the pandemic progressed. It was generally felt that online learning was improving. However, young Roma and young migrants said they expect this figure to be much higher in their communities, even without the pandemic. Some young people also stressed the importance of not overlooking non-formal learning and education. They highlighted the value this had to them, saying there was a need for more promotion of this. They felt that the pandemic could be used to provide opportunities to be more creative about where learning happens, and not so reliant on in-classroom learning.

## What are the possible long-term effects?

Missing school and education are well understood to have an impact on educational outcomes (Sims 2020). It is also widely accepted that lower educational attainment links to lower labour market outcomes and worse life chances generally (Eurofound 2019; Eurostat 2020). Low levels of qualification can increase likelihood of being unemployed, reduced duration of unemployment, reduction in earnings and underemployment (Dolton and O'Neil 1996; Dolton et al. 1999; Hannan et al. 1998; Howieson and Lanelli 2008; Bynner et al. 2002; Wolf 2002). Better education is also linked to a range of non-economic outcomes, it widens the individual's knowledge and horizons, promotes civic rights and responsibilities (EENEE 2018). There is also ample research on the connection between education and quality of life (Eurofound 2019).

It seems likely then that school closures, as well as the accompanying loss of learning young people have experienced, may have a long-term negative impact on their lives. However, the size of this effect is not necessarily clear. Research that predicts the link between education and long-term outcomes may not be directly comparable to the pandemic situation. There is no detailed data on the length and patterns of school closures, so it is not clear how much learning students have missed, and patterns will vary. Similarly, the quality of the remote education and the speed of return to 'normal' education will have a compensating effect. Nevertheless, the research that has attempted to model the impact of school closure still identifies strongly negative long-term consequences for young people across a range of possible scenarios (OECD/Hanusekk and Woessmann 2020; World Bank 2020).

Although the exact scale of long-term impact caused by educational disruption has room for debate, it is still cause for concern. This risk should be considered alongside the general negative impact on the economy, likely to affect young workers strongly and the possible employment scarring that may occur (see previous section). These things together point to significant challenges for young people moving from education to employment in the coming years.

## What has been the policy-makers' response so far?

National policy-makers' responses have, understandably, focused on closure of educational institutions to manage the spread of COVID-19 (Our World in Data 2021). The notable exception seems to be Sweden who attempted to avoid lockdown closures in the early stages of the pandemic before eventually implementing them (OECD, 19 November 2020). Thus, nearly all European countries can be assumed to have had an educational policy response to COVID-19 on some level. However, initiatives to maintain quality of education have taken a backseat compared to managing closure. The task of enabling remote education seems to have largely been managed by educational institutions themselves and at local level.

Within this context, our policy review focuses specifically on national policy responses to *managing the impact on young people's education or ensuring quality of education*. Specific details of many initiatives are not always clear. It is not always identifiable which educational level they are targeted at (primary, secondary, tertiary, etc.). There will no doubt also be a range of local initiatives or smaller initiatives within closure measures that are currently unidentified. Nevertheless, several examples can be found at national level. They can be grouped into several categories:

- 1. Financial relief for students** - Hungary has offered interest free loans to students (Eurofound 2020c). Armenia has paid compensation equivalent to half a year's tuition fees and partial compensation of student loans to those in their final year at university (ILO, n.d.). Turkey has provided cash transfer to primary and secondary school students (75 TRY for girls, 50 TRY for boys, 150 TRY for orphans [ILO, n.d.]).
- 2. Outreach initiatives** - In Slovenia, the project 'Together for knowledge' has focused on ensuring provision of education for all Roma. They worked on maintaining regular communication with Roma students and parents, distributing electronic devices, and ensuring that distance education reached all students (Eiropas Sociālais Fonds 2016). In Germany, social pedagogues called 'transition coaches,' who support school dropouts, provide advice to young people by phone (CEDEFOP 2020). Students in refugee camps in Greece, who could not connect to the internet, received weekly homework packages (OECD, 19 November 2020). The Portuguese Government has provided laptops and internet access to some students from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition, working with Post Office Services and the National Scouts Group, a mechanism was implemented allowing students who lived far from schools or without internet access to receive physical copies of lessons and tasks from schools. Collection and return of homework to the teachers was also organised (OECD, 19 November 2020).
- 3. Distribution of electronic devices** - The Government of Slovenia and The Government of Portugal have put in place initiatives to provide access to laptops and digital devices to vulnerable groups. Partnering with private corporations seems to have been a common factor (OECD, 19 November 2020).
- 4. Increased funding for educational programmes** - Norway, Sweden, Turkey and Spain are all identifiable as having committed to providing additional national funding or financial relief for education (ILO, n.d.). Bulgaria has provided 30 million BGN specifically for remote education (IMF, n.d.). The Netherlands has developed one of the most comprehensive packages, providing around €300 million to help students to catch up on the backlog caused by COVID-19. This can be used for tutorials, 'autumn schools,' catch-up programmes, extra staffing or to provide students with laptops or tablets (ILO, n.d.).
- 5. Retaining physical access to schools** - Several countries have retained physical access to schools for the most vulnerable, such as disabled people or people at risk of violence. Others have allowed access for those whose parents work in essential services or those who do not have internet access. These countries include France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Portugal and Norway (OECD, 19 November 2020).

Overall, with the exception of the Netherlands, most identifiable national policy responses have focused only on managing the impact on education *during* the pandemic. At the time of writing, there seems to be little indication of policy responses that seek to compensate for the educational loss young people have experienced. These may well emerge at a later date, however.

# The impact on: Young people's mental health and wellbeing

## TLDR\*;

Nearly two-thirds of young people may be affected by mental health and wellbeing issues throughout the pandemic.

Young women's mental health and wellbeing was notably worse than young men's. Young people in marginalised situations are also worse affected.

Factors affecting mental health were, feeling isolated, high levels of uncertainty about work or school, unhappiness with changes in work, education or living circumstances, general anxiousness relating to the pandemic.

The longer-term effects of the pandemic on mental health are not likely to be felt equally by all young people. They may magnify pre-existing inequalities, affecting those from marginalised backgrounds the most.

Young people's poor mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic is also likely to worsen their employment and educational prospects after it, as well as their ongoing mental health.

Youth unemployment, poor educational outcomes and poor mental health are all significantly connected. They may feed into one another over the long-term, lasting beyond the pandemic.

There are limited to no identifiable pandemic responses from national policy-makers on young people's mental health.

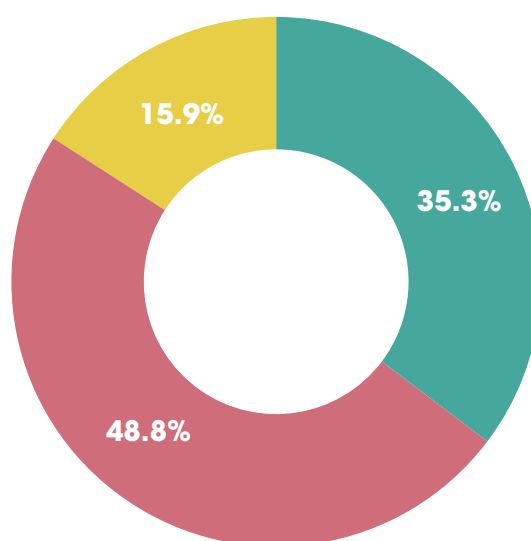
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One of the most concerning findings in the survey is that nearly two-thirds of young people may be affected by mental health and wellbeing issues. Mental health assessment questions included in the survey identified that around half of the young people (48.8%) possibly have anxiety or depression, and a further 15.9% probably have anxiety or depression. To put these figures into comparison, in any typical year, one in every four to five people are normally thought to be affected by mental health issues (Patel et al. 2007).

**Nearly two-thirds of young people may be affected by mental health and wellbeing issues.**

## Mental health and wellbeing of young people

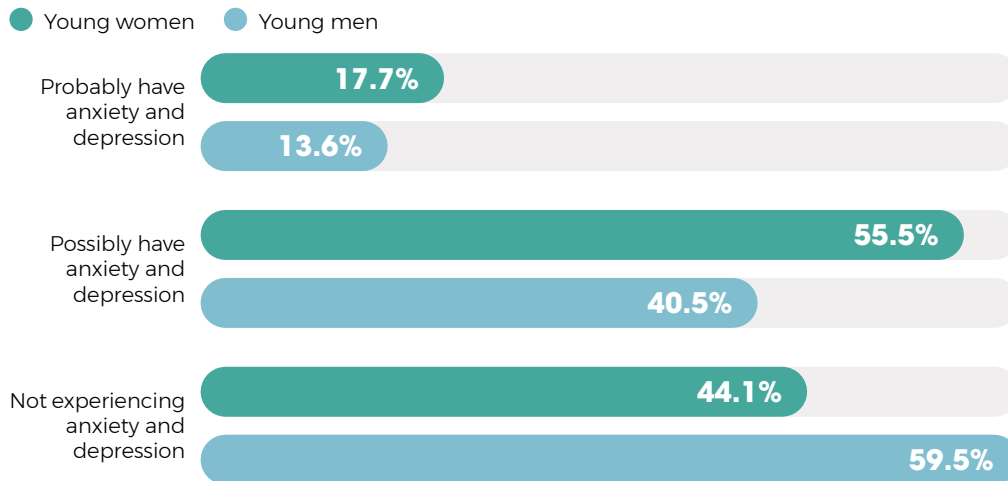
- Young people not experiencing anxiety and depression
- Young people who possibly have anxiety and depression
- Young people who probably have anxiety and depression



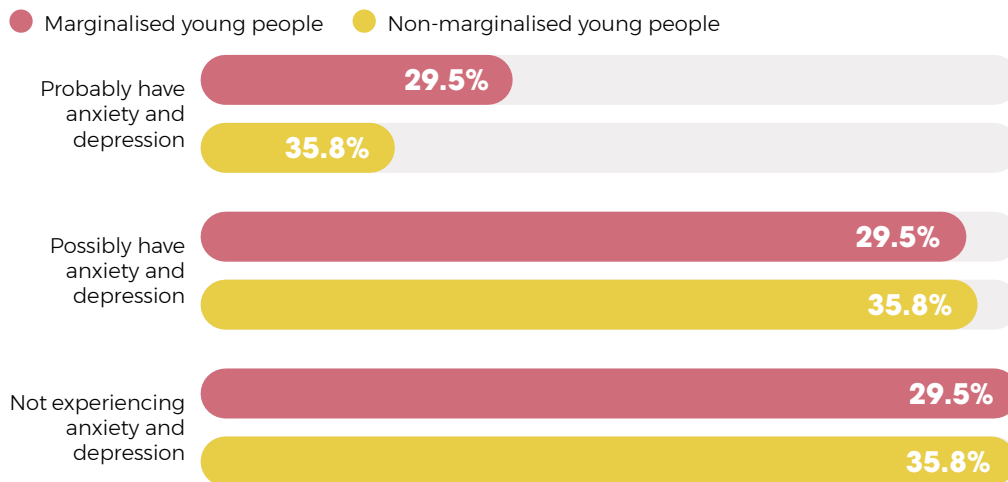


Young women's mental health and wellbeing was notably worse than young men's. 17.7% of young women 'probably' had anxiety or depression compared to 13.6% of young men. In addition, 55.5% of young women 'possibly' had anxiety or depression compared to 40.5% of young men. Young people in marginalised situations were also more severely affected. 19.6% 'probably' had anxiety and depression compared to 12.2% in non-marginalised groups.

## Mental health of young men and young women compared



## Mental health and wellbeing of young people in marginalised situations



## How were the statistics on mental health calculated?

These statistics are based upon the Short Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Health and Wellbeing scale (NHS Scotland 2016) which was incorporated into the survey. SWEMWBS is a widely used and tested measurement of mental health and wellbeing. It uses seven statements which ask the participants to rate how they have been feeling in the past two weeks. Answers are combined into a score of 7-35. Scores in the range of 7-17 indicate probable depression or anxiety, 18-20 suggest possible depression or anxiety, and above 20 suggest no

indication of anxiety or depression. The moderate language in the outcome of the test ('possibly' and 'probably') recognises that formal diagnosis would still require a medical professional's assessment. However, SWEMWBS is one of the most widely used and trusted tools for assessing the mental health of populations and considered highly reliable for this purpose. The robustness of this measure makes the severity of the findings in this survey all the more concerning.

## Messages from young people in the interviews and focus groups

The interviews and focus groups confirmed that mental health and wellbeing was still a significant, possibly even growing, concern for young people. Participants discussed going through similar experiences of mild depression and anxiety. Many described feeling lack of freedom, limited peace of mind, lack of inner peace, and a general change of mentality as the pandemic progressed. Others discussed finding it hard to make sense of the pandemic and what was happening to their lives. Feeling out of control and like a passive recipient seemed to be important.

Factors affecting mental health during the pandemic were identified by the research participants as:

- Feeling isolated, and unable to leave the house to connect with friends.
- High levels of uncertainty about work or school.
- General stress and anxiousness relating to the pandemic itself and its effects.
- Unhappiness with specific changes in work, education or living circumstances caused by the pandemic.

A key issue affecting several young people was unhappiness with being forced to move back to the family home because of a decline in economic circumstances. It was felt that this led to life 'stalling' and a loss of independence. There was concern from young people who identified as transgender about moving back home. For them, this could carry risks for their mental health when their families did not fully accept their sexuality and gender identities. This speaks to a need to go beyond an approach to mental health and wellbeing focused solely on medical intervention, but that also includes support aimed at addressing the socio-economic determinants of mental health and underlying stress factors.

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**Isolation, uncertainty about school and work and stress caused by the pandemic are reported as things affecting young people's mental health and wellbeing.**

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**“I don't think it's fair that we have young people approaching 30 years old who have to move back with their parents ... this is happening a lot right now, but also before the pandemic. We don't help them with starting their own life. It's unfair we are ignoring this big group of young people who can't get employment.”**

Young research participants

Participants described a complexity relating their desires to receive greater mental health and wellbeing support from schools. On the one hand they ideally wanted educational institutions to be the first point of support for wellbeing issues. But they were also concerned about the exceptionally poor quality of support put in place by schools and the way in which schools contributed to poor mental health. They felt schools could play a larger role in supporting mental health but lacked skills and willingness to do so. Many participants reported that schools have not been understanding of the challenges of students during the pandemic.

Several participants described positive youth-led responses to mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic. There were examples of rural organisations, LGBTQIA+ organisations and individuals such as psychology students setting up initiatives to support young people. Rather than being medical support, these initiatives were often linked to building a sense of community and breaking isolation as a way of coping with the pandemic.

## What are the possible long-term effects?

Whilst there may have been some increases in young people's life satisfaction and optimism since April 2020, young people still continue to feel excluded from society and remain at greatest risk of depression compared to other groups (Eurofound 2020d).

The longer-term effects of the pandemic on mental health are not likely to be felt equally by all young people. They are likely to magnify pre-existing inequalities, and affect those from marginalised social backgrounds the most (Mastrotheodoros 2020, citing Ambrose 2020 and Ioannidis 2020). Research on disaster resilience (see Mastrotheodoros 2020) can help predict which young people may experience the greatest long-term mental health impact. This may be:

- Those who are most exposed to the consequences of the pandemic during it (e.g. young people who undergo school closures without sufficient support, have income substantially reduced or have a COVID-related threat for the life of a family member, etc.).
- Young people who experience the pandemic at an important transitional time in their lives (e.g. just before national exams or when transitioning from school to work).
- Young people who already experienced difficulties before the pandemic.
- Young people who live in families, communities or schools with fewer resources.

What is clear, is that a period of poor mental health and wellbeing throughout the pandemic may have lasting effects on many young people well beyond the end of lockdown. Adolescent depression is understood to increase likelihood of mental health problems later in life, leading to issues such as loneliness and needing, but lacking, social support (Claybourne et al. 2019) as well as other health and relationship concerns such as poor sexual health (Patel et al. 2007).

Young people's poor mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic is also likely to worsen their employment and educational prospects after it. This in turn might feed back into their mental health problems. Poor mental health amongst adolescents is linked to weaker educational and employment outcomes, both during the period of poor mental health and in the long term. This includes increased risk of unemployment, school dropout, lower grades and poor attendance (Patel et al. 2007; Fergusson and Woodward, 2002; Cornaglia et al. 2015; Finning et al. 2019). Youth unemployment is significantly connected with poorer mental health (Strandh et al. 2014). Both things feed into, and contribute, to each other. The relationship is bi-directional; good mental health is a key influence on finding a job and staying in that job. Unemployment causes stress, which can have negative consequences for people's mental health, including depression, anxiety and lower self-esteem (Wilson and Finch 2021).

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**Research suggests a period of poor mental health and wellbeing throughout the pandemic may have lasting effects on many young people well beyond the end of lockdown.**

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**Young people's poor mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic is likely to worsen their employment and educational prospects after it.**

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## What has been the policy-maker's response?

The literature review identified no responses from national policy-makers to supporting young people's mental health during and beyond the pandemic. The small number of examples of mental health responses that are identifiable are not targeted at young people, and in many cases are only partially relevant to them. These are:

- **Iceland** (ILO n.d.) is focusing on mental health in remote medical services being strengthened and a new campaign against domestic violence.
- **Belgium** (ILO n.d.) and **Ireland** (Eurofound 2000e) are providing additional mental health support for frontline caregivers.
- **Cyprus** (Eurofound 2000f) is offering a national 'Telecare' psychological services phone helpline to provide mental health support for those affected by the pandemic.
- **Portugal** (Eurofound 2000g) is providing a national mental health helpline giving support to citizens dealing with isolation and the related mental health problems.
- **The Netherlands** has established a single online portal to promote mental health (McCartan et al. 2021).

As in all cases, it is possible that policy responses exist that have not been identified. However, it is clear there is no substantial Europe-wide response. Mental health support that was in place before the pandemic, or is delivered by non-governmental organisations may also be operational, however. For example, the Danish Youth Council and Romanian National Alliance of Student Campaigns have undertaken campaigns providing practical advice for young people on how to cope with working and studying during the pandemic (OECD 2020b).

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**To date, there are no substantial responses from national policy-makers to supporting young people's mental health during and beyond the pandemic.**

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# Conclusion

The impacts of the pandemic are already substantial for young people and their social and economic inclusion. Young workers have experienced considerable loss of work and income as a result of unemployment and reduction in working hours. They are one of the hardest hit social groups. Young people in marginalised situations are twice as likely to be affected by job loss. For those experiencing school closures, the quality of remote education has been variable, often down to individual institutions. Nearly one in 10 young students are not getting any courses, teaching or testing. Around two-thirds of students believe they are learning 'slightly less' or 'significantly less.' Three-quarters of marginalised young people believe they may be learning 'slightly less' or 'significantly less.' Whilst the quality of remote education may have improved as the pandemic progressed, the learning loss has already occurred and the right to education negatively impacted.

Most concerning is the way the pandemic and its impact on young people's social and economic rights have contributed to widespread issues in young people's mental health and wellbeing. Nearly two-thirds of young people may now be affected by depression or anxiety. Young women's mental health and wellbeing was notably worse than young men's. Young people in marginalised situations are also worse affected. This is amplified by feeling isolated, high levels of uncertainty about work or school, unhappiness with changes in work, education or living circumstances and general anxiousness relating to the pandemic. The three-way relationship between education, employment and mental health is crucial to emphasise. Many young people now feel they need to give up on career aspirations and hopes, and accept poor employment conditions in order to remain financially stable. Work uncertainty and instability as well as educational uncertainty are a source of stress and wellbeing issues for young people.

In the long term, youth unemployment, poor educational outcomes and poor mental health are all significantly connected. They may feed into one another over time, lasting beyond the pandemic. Although the scale of the impact is not fully predictable, the educational disruption is likely to lead to long-term negative effects in employment, educational outcomes, and impacts on health and wellbeing. The educational

impact will not necessarily be removed when the educational system physically re-opens. The loss of learning has already occurred. Young people's poor mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic is also likely to worsen their employment and educational prospects after it, as well as their longer-term mental health. The current loss of work may also have long-term 'scarring' effects on future employment opportunities and life chances. These in turn may then go on to further affect mental health and wellbeing.

Even in the best case scenario of a successful vaccination programme and swift economic recovery, the echoes of the pandemic on young people's lives will be felt well beyond any 'return to normal.' Furthermore, the longer-term effects of the pandemic are not likely to be felt equally by all young people. They may magnify pre-existing inequalities, affecting those from marginalised backgrounds the most, particularly in the areas of mental health. It is not possible to predict the exact scale of the impact, and is beyond the scope of this research to attempt to do so. Nevertheless, we believe there is sufficient evidence and cause for concern to assume it is substantial.

With an end to the emergency response to the pandemic in sight in parts of the world, policy-makers should consider responses to reducing the long-term impact on young people of utmost priority moving forward, with a focus on building back better, so that young people no longer experience the inequalities that caused them to be particularly vulnerable to this crisis.

So far, given the scale of the challenges, there has not been enough policy focus on protecting young people's social and economic rights and limiting the long-term impact of educational loss and employment scarring on young people. Whilst broader economic measures are in place, it is not clear how much these will effectively address or reach young people. There has been almost no identifiable national policy response on supporting young people's mental health either currently or moving forward. The three areas of educational loss, economic loss and poor mental health now form a long-term 'pandemic scar.' This may follow young people for the rest of their lives, unless governments and institutions act today to deliver a youth-inclusive recovery.

# Policy recommendations

There is a high degree of support amongst young people for further policy responses to reduce the impact of the pandemic. In the survey:

- 85.5% of young people were in favour of income support (e.g. unemployment payments, cash transfers).
- 85.9% were in favour of employee support (e.g. extra leave, worksharing, flexible work arrangements).
- 81.5% were in favour of opportunities/subsidies for training and learning.
- 79.6% were in favour of company support (e.g. tax breaks, wage subsidies).

Within this research, to identify more detailed policy responses a co-production workshop was held with focus group participants, non-governmental organisations working with marginalised young people, European Youth Forum Member Organisations, European Youth Forum Secretariat, and the research team. Participants explored the research findings and possible ways forward. Based on the outcomes and further policy analysis, the recommendations below are made.

## To reach and support all young people, governments and institutions should:

- Heed the lessons from the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis by making sure that policy responses are not limited to addressing immediate needs, but aim to protect and fulfil young people's rights in the long run.
- Ensure the meaningful participation of young people and youth organisations in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes at all levels aimed at responding to the short- and long-term impacts of the crisis.
- Develop policy responses with a strong intersectional dimension to ensure that they adequately address the situation of different groups of youth, especially the most vulnerable and marginalised. To that end, policy-makers should increase efforts to collect disaggregated data on youth on the basis of factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, health and immigration status.

## Our recommendations on work and income:

- Prioritise quality job promotion in policy responses. Governments and institutions should not relax labour legislation to stimulate high employment or make cuts to vital social welfare programmes that protect young people from precarity and poverty.
- Ensure all young people, regardless of employment status, have equal access to social protection and income support, and remove age-based eligibility that excludes many young people from accessing benefits.
- Secure the access of young people to quality entry-level jobs through better regulation that ensures adequate wages and fair working conditions, to support smoother school-to-work transitions.
- Invest in quality job creation targeting youth, including by providing incentives to employers to hire young people. Financial support should be conditional to the compliance with minimum quality standards that can set youth on a path towards relevant and stable employment.
- Adopt new national Implementation Plans for the Reinforced Youth Guarantee, in consultation with young people and youth organisations, and make sure they are meaningfully involved in the implementation and monitoring stages. Ensure sustainable and adequate funding for Youth Guarantee schemes through national and EU budgets, beyond recovery funds.
- Improve the outreach of existing local, national and European employment support measures by focusing on particularly hard to reach young people and engaging with youth organisations that work with these communities.
- Protect young people's fundamental labour rights and secure their rights to collectively bargain. Encourage education on workers' rights amongst young people in formal and non-formal learning settings, including within job centres, so that young people can have the knowledge to claim their own rights with employers. Provide accessible opportunities for redress for young people when their workers' rights are violated.
- Ensure that the possibility to work from home is not used by employers as a reason to refrain from adapting workplaces to be accessible to people with disabilities and chronic illness.

## Our recommendations on education and learning:

- Reform welfare systems to ensure students have access to adequate income support in case of loss of student jobs. This would ensure that all young Europeans can continue to access their right to education without risking falling into poverty.
- Invest in greater opportunities for tutoring, catch-up classes, or academic support for young people who have fallen behind on their learning or who feel they have learned less as a result of remote learning.
- Provide career guidance through public employment services, but also through schools, universities and training centres in order to support young people through the transition from education to employment in light of today's emerging challenges.
- Provide financial support to ensure all students in all levels of education have access to ICT tools, and can equally participate in digital learning and homeworking outside of school hours. In this context, also invest in strengthening digital literacy both for all students and teaching staff.
- Ensure that the activities within the 2021-2027 Digital Education Action Plan (European Commission, n.d.) consider the specific accessibility and mental health implications of widespread online learning for young people. This would help ensure young people who are most vulnerable are not side-lined in the digital transformation.
- Develop digital accessibility standards in education for adoption at the national level and implementation by educational institutions. These should ensure that all digital tools and platforms used in education are perceivable, operable, understandable and robust, and can be accessed by all people, including people with disabilities and additional communication needs.

## Our recommendations on mental health and wellbeing:

- Commit to the provision of and access to information and quality formal and informal youth-focused mental health services in every educational institution, youth centre, jobcentre, cultural centres and other non-medical service points where young people seek support, to ensure that the most vulnerable young people are reached.
- Invest in mental health literacy and provide training and resources to teachers, administrative staff, job centre staff, youth workers and other non-health related professionals that work with youth, to recognise mental health challenges, provide basic support and referral to medical mental health services when needed.
- Support the right to disconnect of workers, but also of learners and educators. This would promote healthy digital usage and manage the rapid intensification of both online working and schooling to mental health.
- Equip public employment services to provide training, support groups and resources on keeping mentally healthy despite an uncertain economic climate and throughout the challenges of a job search.
- Implement a holistic approach to mental health by recognising the link between socio-economic factors, such as unemployment, housing insecurity, and academic pressures and wellbeing. Address health inequalities to provide adequate support to vulnerable groups of young people who might be at greater risk of mental distress.



# Appendix 1: Survey sample and dataset details

The original data set was filtered to include European countries only. After this it was weighted using the ILO developed country-weights measure, which corrects for gender difference and response rates between countries by age (although this is based on only two genders). Though not the most robust of the ILO weighting measures in the original dataset, the recommended sub-region weighting was based on European and Central Asia. Russia was excluded from the analysis as it's large population size and small response rate made the weighting highly unreliable. As the weighting system works by scaling up to match population size, giving a false sense of size, n numbers are not reported throughout this report. Further details of the original dataset and survey can be found in ILO (11 August 2020) technical annex. Sample sizes for the data analysed in this report are shown below.

Included sample by country				
	Unweighted		Weighted	
	N	%	N	%
Albania	23	0.5	117	0.3
Armenia	53	1.2	151	0.4
Austria	64	1.4	639	1.6
Azerbaijan	89	2	598	1.5
Belgium	103	2.3	837	2.1
Bulgaria	17	0.4	315	0.8
Croatia	12	0.3	145	0.4
Cyprus	11	0.2	85	0.2
The Czech Republic	12	0.3	291	0.7
Denmark	15	0.3	257	0.6
Finland	19	0.4	214	0.5
France	223	5	4,519	11.2
Georgia	29	0.7	196	0.5
Germany	359	8.1	3,817	9.5
Greece	32	0.7	565	1.4
Ireland	15	0.3	310	0.8
Italy	178	4	2,055	5.1
Latvia	27	0.6	98	0.2
Moldova	34	0.8	148	0.4
The Netherlands	76	1.7	1,203	3
North Macedonia	9	0.2	69	0.2
Norway	9	0.2	320	0.8
Poland	2,222	49.9	2,431	6
Portugal	36	0.8	500	1.2
Romania	97	2.2	710	1.8
Slovenia	25	0.6	94	0.2
Spain	119	2.7	2,835	7
Sweden	23	0.5	761	1.9
Switzerland	99	2.2	633	1.6
Turkey	159	3.6	5,449	13.5
The United Kingdom	153	3.4	5,532	13.7
The Ukraine	108	2.4	4,442	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,450</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>40,337</b>	<b>100</b>

Included sample by marginalised group		
	n (unweighted)	n (weighted)
Ethnic religious or minority group	262	2,730
Refugee/migrant	103	1,789
Disability	59	672
LGBTI	187	3,031
From a rural area	927	3,759
Young people in marginalised situations total (one or more of the above)	1,358	10,527

Included sample by working status		
	n (unweighted)	n (weighted)
Working	1,175	21,086
Studying	2,377	10,365
Study and work	506	5,081
NEET	392	3,806

# Appendix 2: References

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