



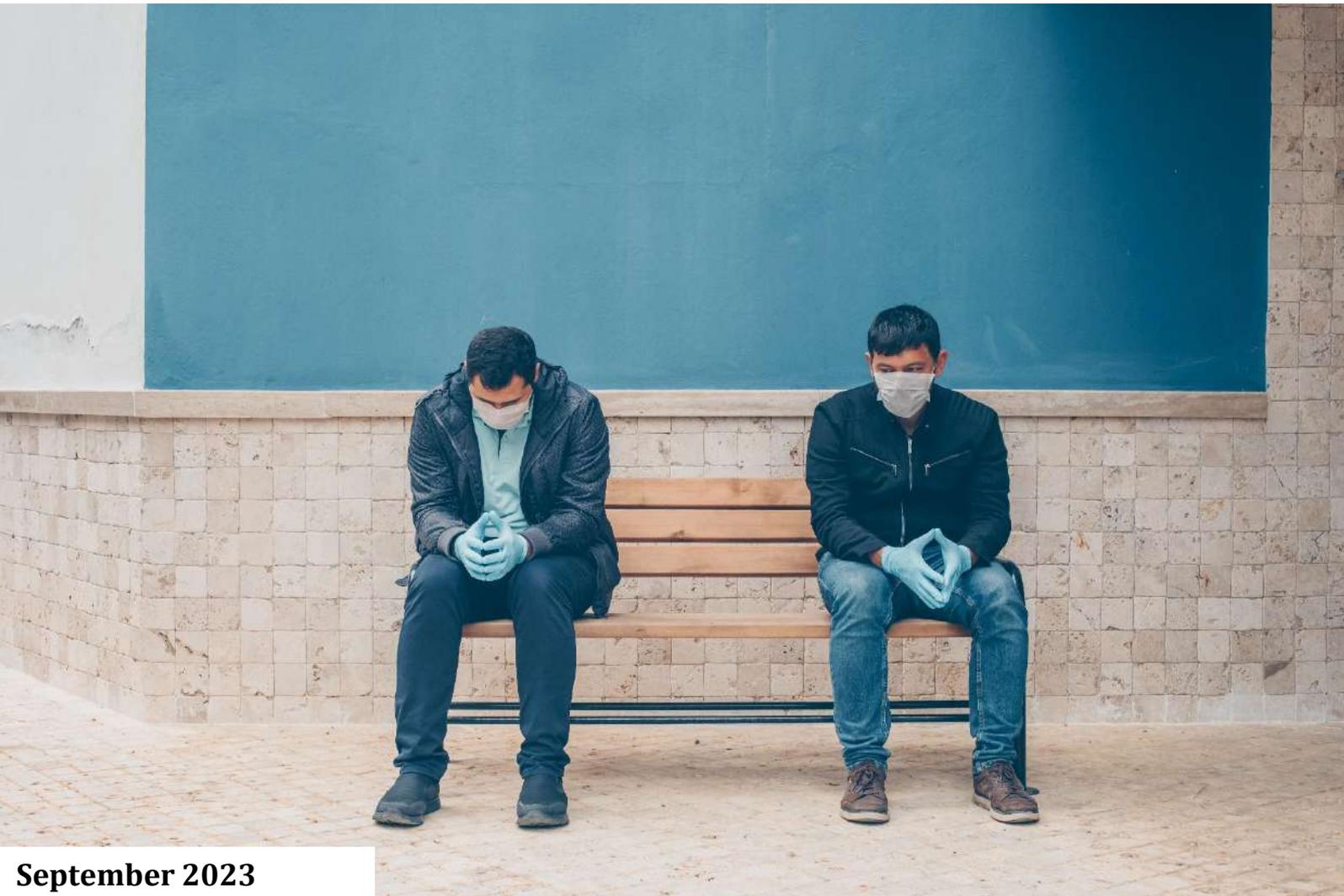
**Project 101091233 - So I BeLiv**

**Research on how the local communities  
reacted to tackle the negative effects of  
COVID-19 crisis on young people in Slovenia,  
Croatia, Spain, France and Italy  
Synthesis Report**



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# 1 Introduction

This document is a synthesis report created to summarize the results of five separate researches carried out in five European countries to investigate how local communities reacted to tackle the negative effects of Covid-19 pandemic crisis on young people, and how young people, the target group of this project, viewed this actions.

The research delves into the response of local communities to the COVID-19 crisis, with a specific focus on the support measures extended to young people. This study examines how the project's partner countries, Slovenia, Italy, Spain, Croatia, and France, addressed the challenges posed by the pandemic for their youth populations. These challenges encompassed economic, educational, and mental health concerns, and local initiatives played a crucial role in mitigating the crisis's impact.

In the economic sphere, each country adopted unique approaches, such as financial aid, job placements, and support for the tourism sector, aimed at stabilizing the financial situations of young individuals. Meanwhile, educational support measures varied, with a focus on bridging the digital divide, flexible academic adjustments, and innovative teaching approaches. Mental health support initiatives were critical in addressing the psychological toll of the pandemic on young people, encompassing counseling services, sports, and community engagement.

Additionally, local authorities in the respective nations demonstrated the significance of civic engagement in times of crisis. They provided essential resources, organized screenings, facilitated community collaboration, and engaged citizens in various activities to support their youth. These local-level efforts proved instrumental in promoting social interaction and mitigating the pandemic's negative effects on young people.

The research also includes a comparative analysis of survey results conducted across partner countries, gathering feedback from young people aged 17 to 29. These surveys aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of measures implemented by national and local authorities in mitigating the pandemic's impact on young individuals. The diverse fields in which partner organizations operate contributed to a heterogeneous pool of respondents, providing valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of young people across different contexts.



## 2 How local community reacted to COVID-19 crisis

### 2.1 Economic and Work-Related Support for Young People

**Slovenia** adopted several measures to provide economic relief to young people, with a specific focus on students. The government introduced digital vouchers of 150 euro per student, aimed to facilitate remote learning. However, this initiative faced criticism due to its late issues and the limited amount of money allocated. Additionally, one-time solidarity allowances and daily allowances were introduced to support students. Yet, eligibility restrictions for foreign students raised concerns.

The tourism sector received a boost with vouchers, though the benefit levels varied for different age groups.

Youth employment was addressed through allowances, job placements, and financial aid, which played a crucial role in stabilizing young workers' financial situations.

**Italy** responded to the economic fallout of the pandemic with National measures including fiscal and financial support for companies and freelancers, such as financial aid, tax, loans and mortgage deferrals, and improved access to credit. Youth employment was supported with measures designed to encourage job placements and apprenticeships, and a ban on layoff was imposed for the duration of the state of emergency.

**Spain** introduced a Social Shield initiative to protect workers, self-employed individuals, and companies, including specific measures aimed at youth. The implementation of ERTes (Temporary Layoff Scheme) provided support by suspending employment contracts for pandemic-related reasons, thus shielding young workers from job loss. Moreover, labor reform increased the number of open-ended contracts, benefitting the youth. Spain also introduced a Minimum Living Income program and raised the minimum wage, further aiding young adults in navigating economic challenges.

**France** adopted measures in support of both the economy and the individuals. Measures included cash flow support, investment financing, and support for purchasing power. Specific measures for young people ("#1jeune#1solution") emphasized job offers, training, civic engagement, housing support, financial aid tools, and more. Student-focused measures covered student loans, combatting menstrual insecurity, affordable meals, registration fee freezes, psychological support, and grants.

**Croatia's** National Government introduced a package of 63 measures to tackle economic problems generated by the Covid-19 pandemic. These included: postponement of the payment of income tax and profit tax and salary contributions; approval of new loans for liquidity to economic entities for financing salaries; "COVID-19 loans" for working capital for small and medium-sized entrepreneurs. Croatia gave great importance to the field of arts and culture by establishing a dedicated Crisis Fund to support the cultural and media



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sector and increasing the implementation of calls for submission of project proposals Art and Culture Online (co-financed by the European Social Fund).

## 2.2 Educational Support for Young People

**Slovenia** is probably the country that most of all recognized the importance of educational support in the pandemic context. It introduced various education-related measures, including the recognition of practical work and adjustments to the Matura exam, which contributed to a more flexible academic environment. Extended study periods and free dorm stays aimed to alleviate the academic pressures faced by young people during the crisis. Furthermore, universities and student clubs actively offered various forms of assistance, promoting a collaborative approach to education.

**Italy** addressed the digital divide among students, recognizing that equitable access to education was essential during the pandemic. Like Slovenia introduced a voucher to support poorer households to purchase digital devices or access fast internet connections.

In **Spain** the autonomous communities implemented measures to reduce the digital divide among students, such as dismantling ICT classrooms and handing out desktop computers to students who needed them due to not having the technical means or economic resources. Educational reinforcement plans were established for pupils with learning difficulties, facilitating communication with families about the measures adopted and the monitoring of students' learning. Thanks to the adaptation of teaching programmes and the organisation of spaces and timetables, the most vulnerable school population continued to be offered the same services they received in schools, but in their homes. All available audiovisual resources were made available to the educational community free of charge and in open access. Finally, the access to university was facilitated by postponing the exams and simplifying their difficulty.

In **France** the government and CROUS (the body responsible for managing university and school facilities) developed measures specifically for students to combat all forms of student insecurity, guarantee continuity of education and maintain the quality of qualifications, mostly thanks to the above mentioned #1jeune#1solution platform.

In **Croatia**, strict measures disrupted young people's access to education, extracurricular activities, and social interactions. These restrictions had considerable implications for students and young adults. However, efforts were made to mitigate the adverse effects on young people's mental health.

## 2.3 Mental Health Support for Young People

In **Slovenia** most of the initiatives in support of people mental health were taken at local level. We are going to analyze the actions promoted by the municipality of Litija later in this report.



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**Italy** introduced several policies in support of young people mental health. The most important initiatives were “Spazi Civici di Comunità” promoted by the Department for Youth Policies and the Universal Community Service (*Servizio civile universale*), in collaboration with the public company *Sport e Salute S.p.A* to provide free access to sports, extra-sports and social activities for young people aged between 14 and 35, including assistance and psychological support to counter the effects of the pandemic and the related youth distress phenomena; “Bonus Psicologo” a voucher of up to EUR 600 per person to support the costs of psychotherapy sessions for people with an *ISEE* (Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator) under EUR 50,000.

**Spain** took comprehensive steps to address the mental health challenges faced by young and adolescent populations during the pandemic. The country updated its Mental Health Strategy with a particular focus on younger age groups. In addition to national initiatives, local-level mental health support programs were introduced to combat feelings of isolation and loneliness among young people.

**Croatia** recognized the importance of psychological well-being and implemented measures such as telephone lines for psychological help. Additionally, support was extended to high school graduates, acknowledging the unique challenges they faced during the pandemic.

**France** implemented several innovative approaches to tackle mental health challenges. It introduced systems like “Mon parcours Psy” and expanded the scope of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) programs. These measures aimed to provide essential mental health support to young people and help them cope with the psychological toll of the pandemic.

## 2.4 Local Initiatives and Civic Engagement

Most of the initiatives and actions to cope with the consequences of Covid-19 pandemic were decided and taken at National level. However, a certain degree of autonomy was left to local realities, whose actions were crucial in order to promote civic engagement and foster social interaction among young people in the respect of all the restrictions. Each partner interviewed a local policy maker in their country to have a better understanding of these aspects.

**The municipality of Litija, in Slovenia**, provided free face masks to face the shortage in the early stage of pandemic; activated a Facebook page and a dedicated website to share relevant information and promote mental health support; Established a telephone line for urgent care, to provide with the basic necessity items, such as food, hygiene items, medicines or other emergency items to those who were unable to leave their homes.

**The municipality of Bompietro, in Italy**, served as a notable example of local-level initiatives and community collaboration. Local authorities in Bompietro organized free COVID-19 screening days, and actively promoted mental health support. Citizens actively



collaborated with local authorities by engaging in various activities to support the community during the pandemic. While the restrictions undoubtedly affected young people, the overall cooperation between citizens and local authorities demonstrated the importance of community collaboration in mitigating the pandemic's impact on youth.

**Spain** is a very decentralized state. The autonomous communities were responsible for restrictions in their territory. **Archidona** is a municipality in the interior of the province of Malaga, in the autonomous community of Andalusia and it was a good example of cooperation between institutions and citizens. Among the actions promoted by the municipalities: street sweeping and increased cleaning; providing material to make masks; equipping schools with air purifiers; lowering local taxes or delaying their payment; approval of additional income support for young people; call for public subsidies to encourage the hiring of young people.

**The department of Pyrénées Atlantiques and the city of Pau in France** have offered their professionals who are unable to work to support the service in action. Local solidarity was put into action to help the most disadvantaged people, to distribute masks, to manage vaccination centers and also to help associations working with vulnerable groups.

More locally, the city of Pau has continued to implement its "Plan anti-solitude" program, complementary to government initiatives. The aim of the anti-loneliness plan is to put in place solidarity-based responses in city neighborhoods to curb isolation and feelings of loneliness. In particular, the plan proposes "small, modest investments" to make public spaces more pleasant and functional. The aim is to give new life or a new function to public spaces in many areas of Pau.

**County of Šibenik-Knin and City of Šibenik in Croatia** helped with making sure that its citizens were aware of all that was happening by providing the information on their website and Facebook page. They also established their own call line intended for all those citizens who, due to measures to contain the spread of coronavirus or possible infection, were unable, forbidden or unwilling to leave their homes and therefore provide themselves with the most essential food, hygiene items, medicines or other emergency items. Grad Šibenik, with the help of local voluntary and humanitarian organizations, and by supporting civic initiatives ("One for others - Šibenik") provided the most urgent care in a way that minimized contact between aid providers and aid seekers.



### 3 Feedback from target group. Comparative analysis of the survey results conducted in the partner countries.

We are now going to make a comparison of the results collected following five surveys conducted in the five partner countries. The surveys were submitted to a sample of this project's target group (young people aged between 17 and 29) in each of the partners country. Its purpose was to gather feedback from the target group about the effectiveness of the measures taken at national and local level by authorities to tackle the negative effects of the pandemic on young people. Because of the different fields in which partner organizations are working, respondents are quite heterogeneous.

#### Demographics:

Age	ES	FR	HR	IT	SI
25 - 29	31.7 %	13.3 %	46.7 %	61.3 %	26.7 %
18 - 24	48.8 %	76.7 %	46.7 %	35.5 %	50 %
≤ 17	19.5 %	10 %	6.7 %	3.2 %	23.3 %

#### Gender:

- Female: 62.4 %
- Male: 36.3 %
- Other/Not specified: 1.3 %

Employment situation	ES	FR	HR	IT	SI
Employed	17.1 %	10 %*	50 %	25.8 %	23.3 %
Student	61 %	76.7 %	30 %	25.8 %	13.4 %
Studying and working	14.6	10 %	3.3 %	38.7 %	23.3 %
Unemployed and looking for a job	7.3 %	3.3 %	13.3 %	9.7 %	26.7 %
Unemployed and not looking for a job	0 %	0 %	3.3 %	0 %	13.3 %

\*Included civil service



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Level of Education	ES	FR	HR	IT	SI
PhD	0 %	0 %	3.3 %	3.2 %	0 %
Ma	12.2 %	6.7 %	16.7 %	38.7 %	6.7 %
Ba	26.8 %	16.7 %	23.3 %	16.1 %	6.2 %
High school	26.8 %	66.7 %	50 %	41.9 %	30 %
Elementary school	34.1 %	10 %	6.7 %	0 %	56.7 %

### 3.1 Common themes and variations:

**Effectiveness of Measures to prevent contagions:** Most respondents across all countries found measures such as mandatory mask use indoors and gathering bans to be effective in preventing contagion. However, a substantial percentage of young people in all countries reported that these measures negatively impacted their lives, with social and mental health aspects being particularly affected.

**Government Responses:** Local and national government responses varied across countries. Some governments provided financial support, while others focused on mental health services or employment support. Respondents often expressed a lack of awareness about these measures, with only a small percentage reporting personal benefit.

**Consultation and Consideration of Youth Opinions:** Across the surveyed countries, young people generally felt that their opinions were not taken into account when governments adopted COVID-19 measures. Recommendations from respondents consistently highlighted the importance of consulting young people and involving them in decision-making processes.

**Additional Measures Recommended:** Respondents in all countries expressed the need for more diverse and inclusive measures to address the negative effects of the pandemic. Commonly recommended measures included additional income support, support for mental health services, strengthening employment services, and promoting educational opportunities with financial support. Most important, respondents stated that such measure should have been adopted for a longer period.

**Impact on Different Groups:** Young people in different life situations experienced the pandemic differently. For example, students questioned their future, while jobseekers faced challenges in finding employment. Despite challenges, young people across all countries demonstrated adaptability and creativity in finding ways to continue living their lives and helping others.



## 3.2 Key Findings and Recommendations

**Effective Communication and Awareness-Building:** In all the surveyed countries respondents agreed that national and local authorities and decision makers should give importance to effective communication and awareness-building about government support measures. Young people reported a lack of awareness about available support, which hindered their ability to benefit from these measures.

**Consultation and Participation:** Governments should have actively involved young people in decision-making processes related to COVID-19 measures. Consulting young people can lead to more relevant and effective policies that address their unique needs and concerns.

**Mental Health Support:** Mental health services should be a central focus in COVID-19 response efforts. Young people consistently emphasized the importance of mental health, and governments should allocate resources and support accordingly.

**Inclusivity and Diversity of Measures:** Response measures should be diverse and inclusive, considering the varied needs and circumstances of young people. This includes additional income support, employment opportunities, educational support, and initiatives to address discrimination.

**Transparency and Accountability:** Governments should maintain transparency and accountability in their responses to the COVID-19 crisis. This includes clear communication about measures taken and their intended impacts, as well as mechanisms for assessing and adjusting policies based on feedback.

**Collaboration with Youth Organizations:** Governments should collaborate with youth organizations, student clubs, and other relevant groups to engage young people in the development and implementation of measures. These organizations can serve as valuable intermediaries for gathering youth opinions and disseminating information.



## 4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the response of each country to the COVID-19 crisis for its young population was both unique and multifaceted. These nations recognized the diverse challenges that young people faced during the pandemic and sought to provide targeted support in various domains, including economic relief, education, mental health, and local-level engagement. By addressing the needs of their youth populations through these measures, these countries aimed to mitigate the pandemic's far-reaching impact on young individuals. Moreover, the collaborative efforts between citizens and local authorities demonstrated the importance of community engagement in times of crisis. These approaches underscore the resilience and adaptability of young people, who emerged as active contributors to society's recovery during these challenging times.

On the other hand, the five surveys conducted in Slovenia, Italy, Spain, Croatia, and France provide valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of young people during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the specific circumstances and government responses varied, common themes emerged, most importantly the need for effective communication, consultation with young people, mental health support, diverse measures, transparency, and collaboration with youth organizations. By addressing these key findings and recommendations, governments can better support young people during ongoing and future crises.



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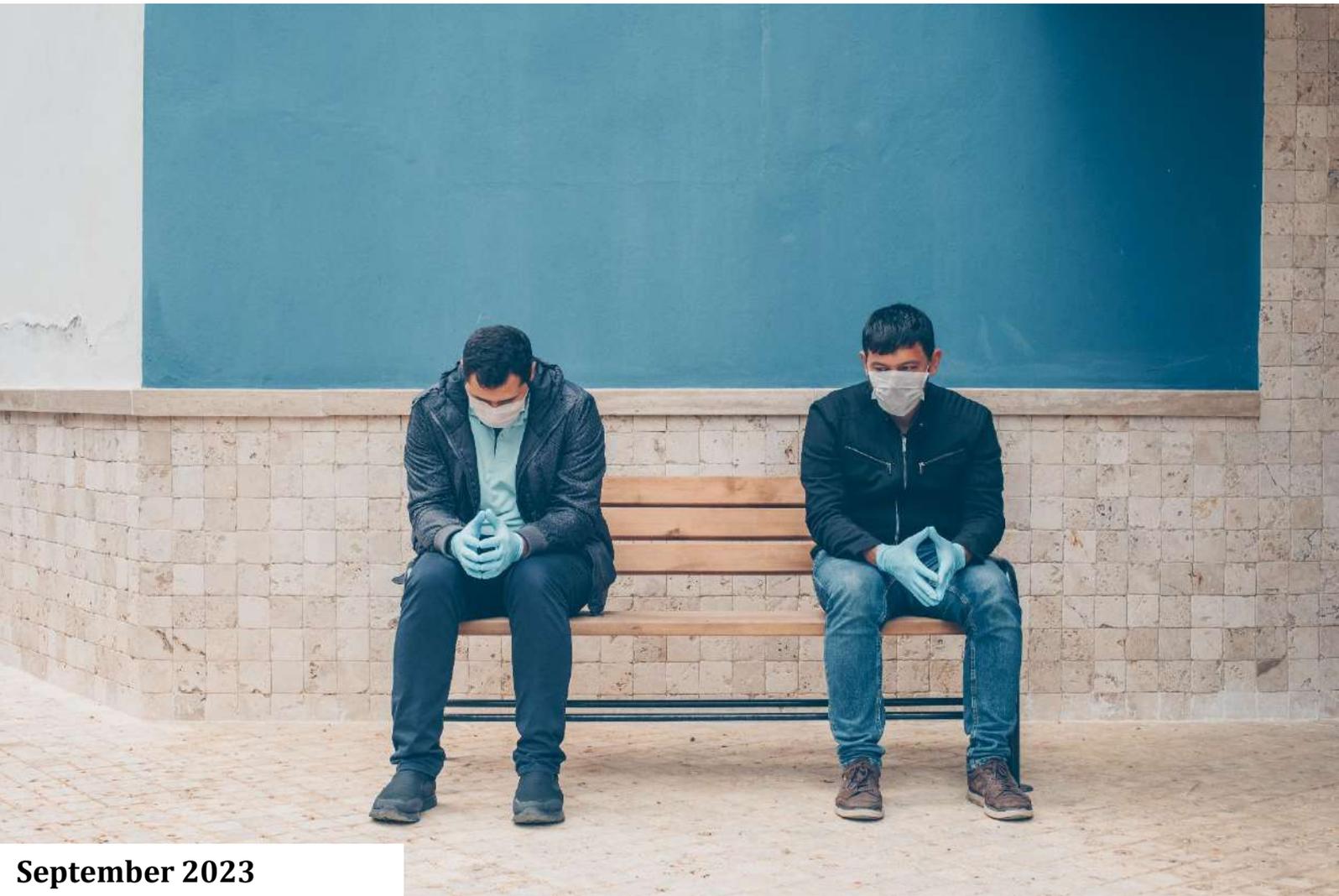
**Project 101091233 - So I BeLiv**

**Research how the local communities reacted  
to the COVID-19 crisis  
National report Slovenia**



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**September 2023**

**Education centre Geoss**



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# 1 Introduction

COVID-19 crisis had an undeniable effect on everyone's lives, but while health issues and medical consequences were discussed in detail, other problems were often overlooked, especially concerning young people. From the view of health issues, youth (18-30) was not affected by the pandemic in a great deal, but went through the same democratic and civic restrictions which had an immense impact on their employment and education, health, wellbeing and lifestyle, which might lead to even worse civic and democratic participation of young people on local/national/European levels. We wish to include youth groups who were particularly vulnerable to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (young people working part-time, young people who just finished their education, young people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, young people with existing mental health issues, and young people with housing or family issues).

Implementing this research, we would like to see how the local communities reacted to the COVID-19 crisis. With this research, involved partners will provide and compare the results in Croatia, France, Italy, Slovenia, and Spain regarding how the local authorities and the national governments of each country reacted to the COVID-19 crisis. The aim is to use received data to form proposals on how to tackle socio-economic issues resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and other potential future global or national crises.

To address these challenges, the forthcoming report will undertake a desk research approach, focusing on an examination of the localized community responses to the COVID-19 crisis. Moreover, the report will undertake an in-depth analysis of the reactions demonstrated by a targeted demographic group. This analysis will be based on the findings stemming from a previously conducted survey, which looks into the efficiency of measures adopted to mitigate the repercussions of the COVID-19 crisis.

The survey in question was administered to participants enrolled in the Slovenian initiative titled "Project Learning for Young Adults." This demographic group,



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predominantly composed of NEETs (individuals who are not in Education, Employment, or Training), is intentionally selected as the focal point of the study, given their intrinsic relevance to the research objectives.

Augmenting the aforementioned components, the report will encapsulate a concise rendition of an interview conducted with a local policymaker. This dialogic engagement will afford insights into the operational scope of municipalities amidst the throes of the COVID-19 crisis.

The report will also include a shortened version of an interview with a local policy maker, providing an insight into the extent of the municipalities' capabilities and interventions undertaken during the period of the COVID-19 crisis.



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## 2 How local community reacted to COVID-19 crisis

The first case of infection with the then-new coronavirus was confirmed in Slovenia on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2020, and the Slovenian government declared COVID-19 to be an epidemic on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020, at 6 p.m. Many measures and restrictions followed the declaration due to the medical consequences and deaths that the disease brought. The government took extremely strict measures that had a major impact on people's lives (Kovač et al., 2021). Amongst some of the harshest measures were the following: ban on public indoor events, closing of schools and universities (resulting in online learning), closing of non-emergency shops (e.g., shops selling clothes, mobile phones ...), cafes and cultural institution, ban of public transport, ban of movement outside the municipality of permanent or temporary residence, with a few exceptions (e.g. commute to work in another municipality) (STA, 2022).

The National Youth Council of Slovenia conducted a survey on the topic of changes brought about by the emergence of COVID-19 in August 2020, a couple of months after the first wave of the epidemic. The final analysis included 743 respondents, 92% of whom were under 30 years of age. 40% of them were students and 36% pupils. The survey showed that young people have been affected by the crisis in the context of the epidemic, both in terms of sudden changes (e.g., relocation), reduction in income, changes in their mental state, etc. Young people clearly missed normal social contacts, especially with their friends and schoolmates. While young people weren't affected much in terms of health problems, they were still amongst the most affected because of the changes. One of the biggest challenges that young people faced was the closing of schools, and the survey shows that most young people (72 % of respondents) considered home-schooling during the epidemic of COVID-19 to be less effective than usual. By the end of May, 2021, Slovenian schools have been closed for 154 days (Krek, 2021). More than half of the respondents claim that they did not receive clear information and instructions and therefore didn't learn the material as well as they normally would. A fifth of learners did not have all the necessary or sufficient equipment for distance education, and a good third had problems with their internet connection.



The pandemic greatly affected young people and a state-intervention was necessary in order to help them conquer the consequences.

## **2.1. Measures taken by the state for young people**

Most of the measures taken by the state were focused specifically on secondary school students and also university students, in order to help them overcome the education and employment crisis they found themselves in.

### **2.1.1. Digital vouchers 2022**

In order to help conquer the economic difficulty that young people faced during the pandemic with regards to their schooling, the government decided, in May, 2022, to gift digital vouchers in the amount of €150 (per voucher) that could be used to buy computer-related equipment, as part of the Digital Inclusion Promotion Act. The 2022 digital voucher was available to beneficiaries from 15<sup>th</sup> June to 30<sup>th</sup> November 2022. The beneficiaries of the vouchers were school-aged children enrolled in grades 7, 8 or 9 of primary school, secondary school students, students of higher education institutions (higher vocational education), students of first, second or third Bologna cycle programmes under the higher education regulations or participants in subsidized education, aged 55 or over (Vodeb, 2022). The state earmarked €33.17 million to promote digital inclusion and there were 221,166 beneficiaries of the digital voucher in Slovenia (Šabeder, 2022)

The largest amount, almost €11 million, was spent on headsets and headphones. Slightly less (9.3 million) was spent by beneficiaries on computers. This was followed by computer screens (2.5 million), keyboards and mice (2.3 million) and printers (1.5 million) (Šabeder, 2022).

The digital voucher has been criticized heavily, especially after the results show how it was spent. It was estimated that the largest amount of money will go straight to the American company Apple which designs the popular air pods. Slovenian Minister for Digital Transformation, Emilija Stojmenova Duh, wrote on Twitter: “[The digital voucher we inherited from the previous government, for which we will spend nearly €60 million, is mainly intended to finance equipment made abroad, in the development of which our



companies have had no significant role and/or benefit]” (J.Z., 2022). The opinions of many people, including young people, were similar, because sadly, the vouchers came a bit late. The first closure of schools and universities happened in March 2020 and the digital voucher was ready to be used in June 2022. In this two-year period, students were already forced to buy their own computer equipment if they wanted to continue with their schooling normally. Another thing is that for underprivileged students with a poor economic background, while the €150 helped, they still needed to put a good amount of their own money to buy a computer, so many decided against doing so.

### **2.1.2. Solidarity allowance**

Due to the closing of non-emergency shops (e.g. shops selling clothes, mobile phones ...), cafes and cultural institution during the COVID-19 pandemic, many young people were unable to work and therefore earn a profit. In order to help them out, the state gifted them two one-time solidarity allowances of €150 for full-time students with permanent residence in the Republic of Slovenia, but not for foreign students in Slovenia. The first allowance was given to conquer the effects of the first wave of the epidemic and was to be paid by 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020. The second allowance was to be paid by 31<sup>st</sup> January 2021 and was given to conquer the effects of the second wave (DATA D.O.O., 2021).

In addition to the two allowances for all students, there was also a one-time allowance for all students who have been involved in assisting in the provision of integrated patient care in health or social care institutions and in carrying out mobile testing and vaccination against COVID-19 between 11 November 2021 and 30 June 2022. The allowance is up to €30 per day of duty. The total monthly allowance cannot exceed 30% of the average monthly net salary of employees in Slovenia in the previous calendar year (Študentska organizacija Slovenije, 2022).

### **2.1.3. Tourism vouchers**

Many students work in hospitality and tourism, and the catering sector is actually the leading sector in terms of the number of job opportunities for students. When the COVID-19 epidemic hit and these sectors temporarily closed down, the effects could be seen throughout the whole nation on different levels. Young people did not only lose



their source of income, they were also unable to travel and hang out with their friends. In order to remedy the consequences of the closure of the tourism sector, the state decided to gift Slovenian citizens two different tourism vouchers. Amongst the recipients of the voucher were also young people.

The first tourism voucher tried to remedy the effects of the tourism epidemic in order to improve the economic situation in the field of tourism consumption. The value of the voucher allocated to the beneficiaries was €200 for people of legal age at the time, or €50 for all other persons (Finančna uprava Republike Slovenije, n.d.).

The second tourism voucher BON21 tried to remedy the consequences of the epidemic in the hospitality, tourism, sport and culture sectors, in order to improve the economic situation by stimulating consumption in the hospitality, tourism, sport and culture sectors. The value of the voucher allocated to the beneficiaries was €100 for people of legal age at the time, or €50 for all other persons (Finančna uprava Republike Slovenije, n.d.).

#### **2.1.4. Measures related directly to school, universities**

In order to help students to bridge the gap in their education, the state did enforce some measures that were mostly focused on university students and students enrolled in the last year of secondary school.

Many students go to vocational school or have mandatory practical work as part of their college degree, and due to the pandemic, lots of students were unable to partake. If, as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic, pupils, apprentices and students in their final year have not been given the opportunity to undertake practical work-based training and practical training with employers, they were recognized as having passed if they have completed all the vocational modules in their final year with a pass mark (Študentska organizacija Univerze na Primorskem, 2020).

In addition, universities allowed their students the possibility of an extra year of study in case of the inability to fulfil the necessary study requirements and the possibility of



suspending scholarships in the following academic year if the epidemic prevents students from completing their studies.

As living arrangements are one of the biggest financial burdens on students, the state decided to allow the students a free stay in student dorms for the time when it was not possible to reside there. However, many university students reside in private accommodations, as there is not enough space in the dorms, so lots of students still had to pay for their apartments or rooms, even if they were unable to live there (Študentska organizacija Univerze na Primorskem, 2020).

Many students (especially secondary school students, but also university) commute to school or university and while the monthly payment for the ticket is subsidized and therefore not that expensive, it is still a financial burden if you do not have a monthly income. The state therefore decided to give students free public transport tickets for times when it was not possible to use public transport (Študentska organizacija Univerze na Primorskem, 2020).

Last of the measures taken by the state that affects the youth concerns the Matura exam, which is a school-leaving exam that students of last year of secondary school take to finish their education. The Matura exam affects students greatly, as its results influence university acceptance and therefore the rest of their lives. Students of secondary schools were unable to properly learn the material needed for the exam, as they spend months in online classes, which was not as effective as in person learning. This also severely affected their mental health, as a result of the stress over the whole situation. The state consequently decided that there is a need for some remedies to the Matura exam:

- Candidates who meet the conditions for taking the Matura exam in the spring examination period but who, due to health problems or other legitimate reasons resulting from the epidemiological situation, wish to take the exam for the first time in the autumn examination period, may submit an application to the competent State Board 30 days before the deadline for taking the exam, or within 24 hours from the time of the occurrence of the reason. In this case, their



university application does not get affected and it counts as if they completed their Matura in the spring period.

- General bonus: for all subjects of the Matura exam, for the external parts of the examinations (written examinations, examination performances), the amount of the bonus is 10% per failed part of the external part of the examination.
- Reducing the volume of material (e.g., when taking the Slovene Matura exam, the students could write the essay on one whole book instead of comparing two).
- Adjustments to oral examinations, 15% reduction in the volume of material (Tavčar Krajnc, 2020).

### 2.1.5. Measures taken by other organizations for young people

In addition to the state measures, some other organizations also decided to help young people in various ways. For example:

- University of Ljubljana, in the study year 2020/2021, enabled students to enroll into the next higher year with only 51 credits (instead of the usual 53) without having to write an application, as the COVID-19 pandemic counts as a special circumstance for exceptional enrollment.
- Ptuj Student's Club (KPŠ) decided to gift 5 members of the club (university students or students of secondary schools) a one-time allowance of €150 to help them with their costs.
- Similarly, Slovenian Student Union (ŠOS), together with the Foundation Študentski tolar, awarded an allowance of €150 to students (Slovenian citizens) in social need. The students had to showcase their social need and the lack of funds due to the pandemic.

## 2.2. Examples of initiatives at local levels: an interview with a local policy maker

During the interview with a local policy maker, she confirmed the supposition that municipalities had no level of autonomy in adapting the nationwide restrictions. They had to



enforce the restrictions if they liked them or not. However, municipalities could offer additional help to their citizen in the form of protection, counsellors, etc.

One of such actions by the municipality of Litija was to give away free protective masks to citizens. At first, it was very difficult to buy masks as they were sold out and the municipality saw this need. All households in the municipality of Litija received 3 protective masks, which were provided in cooperation with the municipal Civil Protection Headquarters. The masks, together with instructions on how to prevent the spread of the coronavirus and important telephone numbers, were packed voluntarily by the municipal administration staff, taking into account all protective measures.

Another thing the municipality helped with was making sure that its citizens were aware of all that was happening by providing the information on their website and Facebook page. They shared relevant information and web pages dedicated to the COVID-19 pandemic. They also promoted mental health support in epidemiological situations by making sure citizens knew which phone number to call for help.

The municipality also established their own call line intended for all those citizens who, due to measures to contain the spread of coronavirus or possible infection, are unable, forbidden or unwilling to leave their homes and are unable to provide themselves, or through the help of relatives, friends and acquaintances, with the most essential food, hygiene items, medicines or other emergency items. The Municipality of Litija, with the help of voluntary and humanitarian organizations, provided the most urgent care in a way that minimized contact between aid providers and aid seekers.

Apart from all the aforementioned initiatives, the municipality did not put into effect any measures targeting specifically young people. However, in the municipality, there is a very active student club as well as a youth center, so the two organizations were more focused on helping young people. The student club never fully closed its doors, they still tried to do activities while following the national guidelines and of course obeying the rules of social



distancing. One of such things was promoting outdoor sports, for example running, and forming small groups so that students could still have some form of socialization.

### 3 Feedback from target group

To determine the effectiveness of measures taken to mitigate the COVID-19 crisis, we surveyed 30 young people between the ages 17 and 29 with an online questionnaire. The questionnaire presupposed that the COVID-19 crisis is truly over and done and we are now looking back and reflecting on the measures taken to mitigate the COVID-19 crisis and their effectiveness. The questionnaire was carried out prior to this, however from April 1, 2023, according to the decision of the epidemiological profession in Slovenia, Covid-19 is treated in the same way as other respiratory infections (Republika Slovenija GOV.SI, 2023).

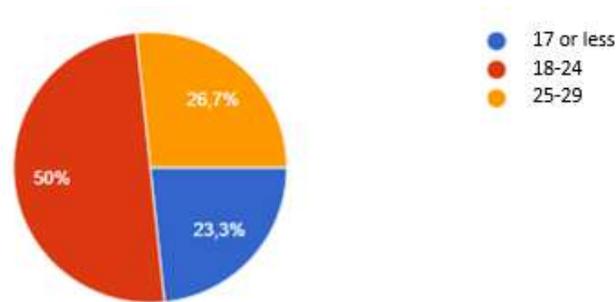
The questionnaire was anonymous and distributed among participants of a Slovenian program Project Learning for young adults, who belong to the target group of NEETs. It was also distributed online (through social media, and web pages of the Slovenian project partner and associated partner) to anyone within the target group interested in participation.

#### 3.1. Demographic information

- All the respondents live in Slovenia.
- Half of the respondents were between 18-24 years old, 26.7% were between 25-29 and 23.3% were 17 years old or less. Results are shown in Figure 5.



Figure 1: Age of respondents



- The current situation of respondents shows (as seen in Figure 6) that the majority are unemployed and looking for a job (26.7%), 23.3% are studying and working and 23.3% are working. 13.3% are unemployed and not looking for a job.

Figure 2: Current situation



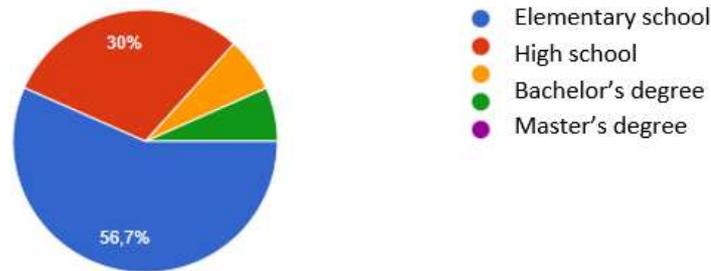
- Last level of finished education is, for the majority of young people participating in the questionnaire, (56.7%), elementary school, followed by high school graduates (30%).



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Figure 3: Last level of education completed



- 50% of respondents answered that they are facing some kind of disadvantages: 23.3% are faced with disadvantages linked to education and training systems (barriers may be faced by people who find it difficult to perform in education and training systems for various reasons, early school leavers, NEETs, and low-skilled adults), 16.7% are faced with economic barriers (such as low standard of living, low income, learners needing to work to support themselves, welfare dependency, long-term unemployment, precarious or poverty-stricken situations, homelessness, indebtedness or financial problems, etc.), 6.7% are facing barriers linked to discrimination (discrimination linked to gender, age, ethnicity, religion, beliefs, sexual orientation, disability) and 3.3% are facing geographical barriers (living in remote or rural areas).

### 3.2. Effectiveness of measures taken to mitigate the COVID-19 crisis

- When asked about which restrictions the Slovenian national government or local authorities put in place to reduce the spread of infection, data shows that all of the restrictions provided have been put in place at some point. As we can see in figure 4, the results for the national government and local authorities are very similar. Respondents chose mandatory use of masks indoors and ban on gatherings as their top two choices of restrictions in both cases, the local authorities and the national government. For more results, see figure 4.

Figure 4: What restrictions has your national government/local authority put in place to reduce the spread of infection?



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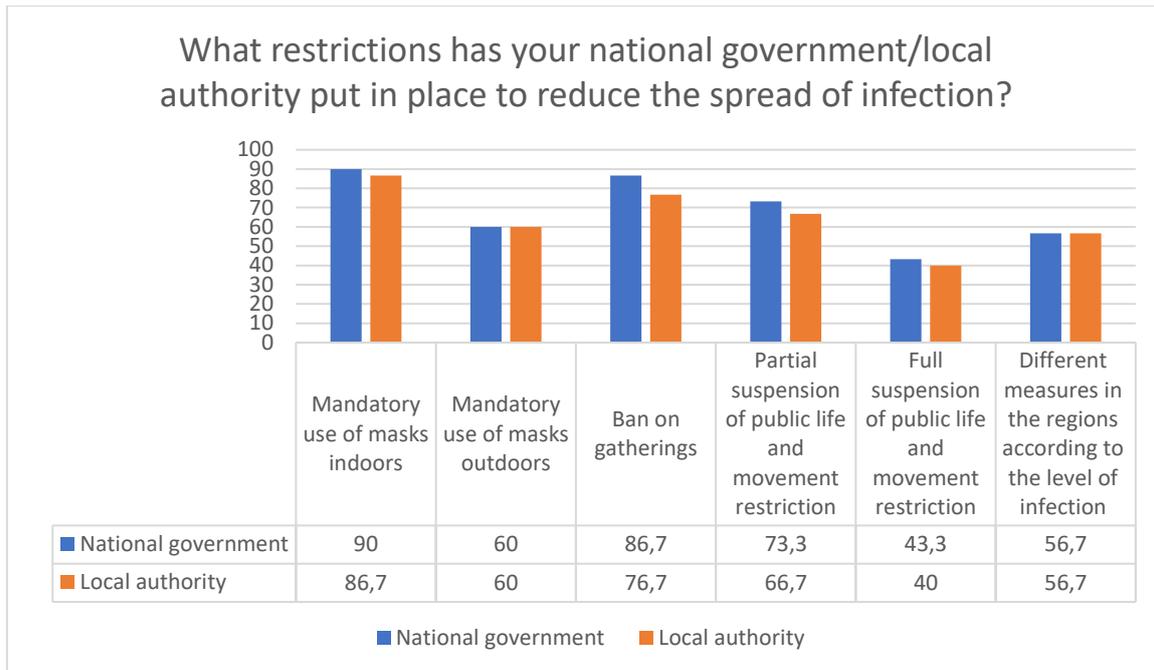


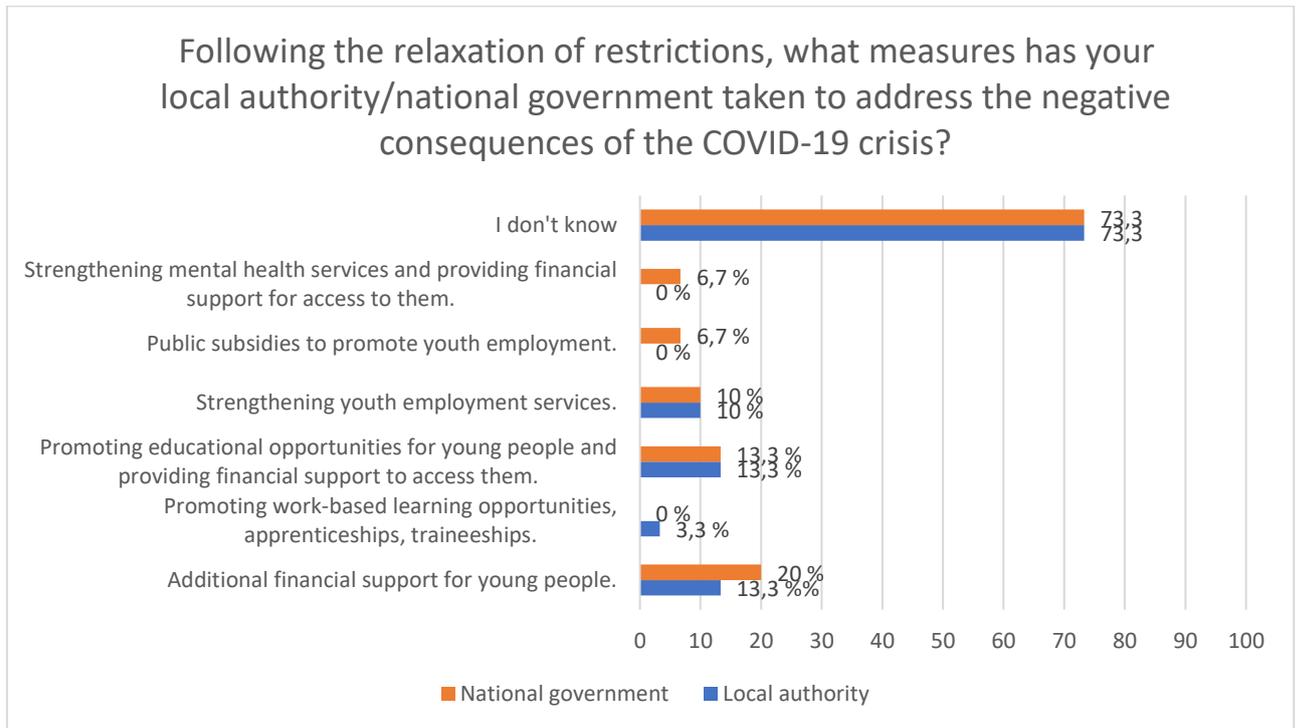
Figure 4: Data is expressed in percentages (%)

- 50% of respondents partially agree that in their opinion, the measures taken have achieved their objective of preventing infections, while a staggering 33.3 % of respondents do not agree with the statement.
- Additionally, 36.7 % of respondents agree that the restrictions have negatively impacted their lives, while 26.7 % participant partially agree and 30 % do not agree.
- Social aspects (73.3 %), psychological/mental health aspects (60 %), and educational aspects (46.7 %) were the most affected aspects of life, with health and economic aspects being the lowest on the scale with only 30 %. This shows that while the COVID-19 crisis did not necessarily affect the youth's health, it did impact other aspects of their lives.
- The national government and local authorities took similar measures to address the negative consequences of the COVID-19 crisis, following the relaxation of restrictions. The majority of respondents in both cases answered with 'I don't know' (73.3 %), when asked about which specific measures the governments



took, showcasing the lack of knowledge on the topic. More results are shown in figure 4.

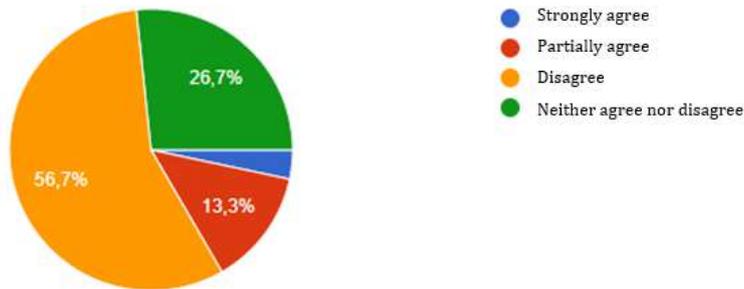
Figure 5: Following the relaxation of restrictions, what measures has your local authority/national government taken to address the negative consequences of the COVID-19 crisis?



- 36.7 % of respondents neither agree nor disagree that actions taken at national level have had an impact at local level in the community, while 26.7 % partially agree, 23.3 % strongly agree and 13.3 % disagree.
- When asked about which measures were beneficial, most participants answered that none of them were beneficial or they weren't sure of the answer. The only other agreed-upon answer was wearing masks (indoors).
- 56.7 % of respondents disagree that measures taken at the local level have taken into account the views of young people, while 26.7 % neither agree nor disagree. Only 13.3 % partially agree, as seen in figure 4.

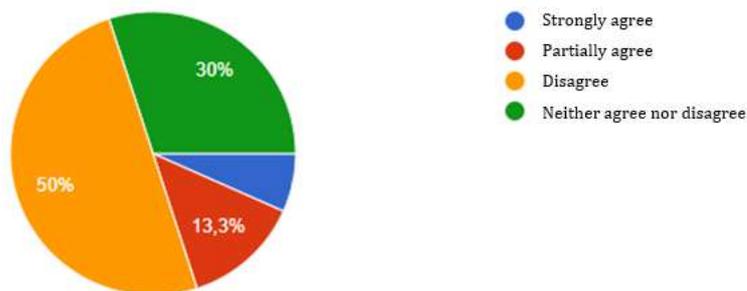


Figure 6: Measures taken at local level have taken into account the views of young people.



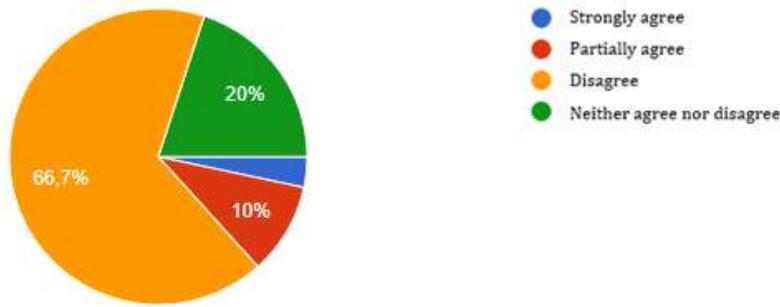
- Similar results are shown in figure 7 for the national level. We can again see that the opinions on local and national levels are very similar, as there was practically negligible difference between the two.

Figure 7: Measures taken at national level have taken into account the views of young people.



- 66.7 % of respondents claim that the local authorities have not taken young people's views into account and did not ask for their input in determining the measures to be taken to help them. Only 10 % of respondents believe that their views were taken into account.

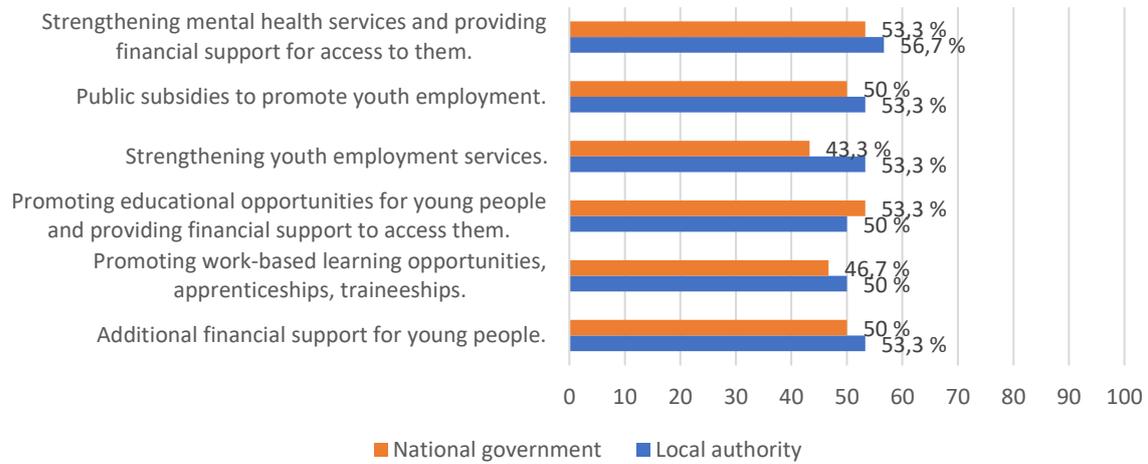
Figure 8: Local authorities have taken young people's views into account and asked for their input in determining the measures to be taken to help them.



- When asked about what the local authorities have done to get the opinion of young people or what should they have done, the majority of respondents said that they do not know or that they did not do anything to get the opinion of young people. The respondents agree that the local authorities should have just simply asked the youth what they want or need and not simply decide for them. In order to get the opinion of the youth, local authorities could connect with youth organization or student clubs, or carry out surveys.
- The results for local authorities and the national government in the following question were, again, very similar: What other measures do you think the local/national authority should take to better address the COVID-19 crisis? All the measures had an approximately 50 % of agreement, results are shown in figure 7.

Figure 9: What other measures do you think the local/national authority should take to better address the COVID-19 crisis?

### What other measures do you think the local authorities/national government should take to better address the COVID-19 crisis?



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## 4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on young people extends far beyond the realm of health, casting a profound shadow over their employment, education, well-being, and overall quality of life. While the health risks posed by the pandemic were not as impactful for the youth demographic, the ripple effects of democratic and civic restrictions were keenly felt. The measures undertaken by both national governments and local communities have revealed gaps and limitations in addressing the challenges faced by young individuals during this crisis.

This research has delved into the responses of local communities in Slovenia, shedding light on how authorities at various levels dealt with the crisis's repercussions. The initiatives taken, such as digital vouchers, solidarity allowances, and education-related adjustments, were steps in the right direction but fell short of truly mitigating the harmful impact. The experiences shared by our target group, particularly the NEETs enrolled in the Slovenian initiative "Project Learning for Young Adults," showed the need for more holistic and specific interventions.

Through this study, we have also gained valuable insights from local policymakers, enhancing our understanding of the challenges faced by municipalities in navigating the complexities of the COVID-19 crisis.

Keeping all of this in mind, it is evident that a collaborative and comprehensive approach is essential for addressing the various dimensions of the crisis's impact on young people. While short-term measures can offer immediate relief, a sustained commitment to bettering education systems, enhancing employment opportunities, and nurturing mental health support networks is of the utmost importance. By harnessing the lessons learned from this crisis, we can not only fortify our response to potential future challenges but also pave the way for a more resilient and inclusive society that empowers its young citizens.

In essence, the COVID-19 crisis and the response to it have illuminated the intricate web of problems that shape the lives of young people. The road to recovery must be marked



by adaptability, innovation, and a dedication to fostering the holistic well-being of the youth – not only as a response to crises but as a fundamental commitment to shaping a brighter and more equitable future for all.



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**Project 101091233 - So I BeLiv**

**Research how the local communities reacted to  
the COVID-19 crisis  
National report Italy**



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**September 2023**

**Unione degli Assessorati**



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## 1 Introduction

After the first part of this project, during which the partners investigated the effects that Covid-19 pandemic and the aftermath of lockdown had on several aspects of young people's lives, we now move on and try to analyse how national and local government reacted to this emergency and what actions were taken to mitigate these effects.

During the first part of this report, we are going to see what measures have been adopted and what actions were taken by Italian national government to tackle the negative effects that post-pandemic crises had on young people. Then we are going to analyse in detail a specific case study, i.e., the actions taken by the Municipality of Bompietro, associated partner in the project, and if there were any differences between National and local policies. For this purpose, we interviewed its mayor Pier Calogero D'Anna.

Finally, we are going to analyse what our target group, young people, think about the measures adopted and the actions taken at local and national level, and if they consider such measures effective or not. For this purpose, we are going to analyse the results of a survey submitted to a sample of 31 young people. Along with the survey we also conducted a group interview with a small group of 4 young people from Centro TAU, an youth organization based in Palermo working in the Zisa neighbourhood with fragile young people.

## 2 How local communities reacted to COVID-19 crisis.

### 2.1 National measures taken to cope with the economic crisis generated by COVID-19

As we analysed in the research carried out in the first part of this project, the pandemic damaged most of the country's economic compartments (tourism, agriculture, trade, etc.), compromising the growth of the national economy. As a result of the lockdown imposed by the government to counter the spread of the virus, hotels, restaurants, and other sectors (sports, entertainment, culture) were forced to close down, suffering serious, in some cases irreparable damage. Many companies had to resort to state aid such as furlough for their employees and various kinds of bonuses to bear the costs of the crisis.

Inequalities, therefore, increased among adults, in the labour market, but also among young people. As shown by the ISTAT note (2020, p. 17)<sup>1</sup> the effects of the employment crisis due to the health emergency, at least until the second quarter of 2020, have mainly affected the most vulnerable components of the labour market (young people, women and foreigners), on the least protected categories (precarious and undeclared workers) and the areas of the country that showed the most difficult employment conditions even before the pandemic: the South. In other words, the pandemic seems to have exacerbated the pre-existing gaps in the labour market.

In Italy, the Government intervened by introducing several fiscal and financial measures to support the segments of the population most affected by the pandemic. Starting with Decree-Law No. 18 of 2020, known as the *Cura Italia* 'Cure Italy' decree, 25 billion were allocated to strengthen the Health System and Civil Protection, to support employment, and to suspend deadlines for the payment of loans, mortgages, taxes, and contributions.

Decree No. 23 of 2020 on access to credit for businesses, known as the *Decreto Liquidità* (Liquidity Decree), introduced several support measures for small and large enterprises.

With Decree No. 34 of 2020 called *Decreto Rilancio* (Relaunch Decree) 55 billion was allocated to limit the economic impact of the health emergency on businesses, VAT-registered workers, employees, families, and the Third Sector.

The *Decreto Agosto* (August Decree) provided additional benefits in continuity with the previous ones. The *Decreto Ristori* (Restoration Decree) provided a further 5 billion to support entrepreneurs who had to close their businesses: restaurants, bars, pizzerias, pastry shops, ice cream parlours, theatres, cinemas, gyms, swimming pools and so on.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.istat.it/it/files/2020/09/Mercato-del-lavoro-II-trim\\_2020.pdf](https://www.istat.it/it/files/2020/09/Mercato-del-lavoro-II-trim_2020.pdf)



Finally, Decree No 41 of 2021, known as the *Decreto Sostegni* (Support Decree), earmarked 32 billion for the production sectors affected by the closures and for the purchase of vaccines.

With the resumption of the pandemic in November 2020, in addition to the extension of furlough and the layoff block, the government also allocated funds to compensate companies for turnover losses caused by the lockdown. These funds were allocated differently according to the area and to the risk scale, hence the limitations imposed on activities. In the large yellow areas (lowest risk level), the benefit was 100% for taxis and public cars, 150% for 12 types of activity (hotels, tourist villages, etc.), 200% for 38 types of activity (including bars, restaurants, pastry shops, cinemas, etc.) and 400% for discotheques alone. In the orange (medium-high risk) and red (high risk) areas, where more categories were subject to lockdown, the benefit was increased to 200% for all (except discos, which remain at 400%). Shopkeepers and activities that are part of the 40 categories that were subject to total closures and to the payment of Imu (property tax), benefited from tax sterilisation, along with the extension of the furlough for their employees and the tax credit for rents. The decree also allowed to extend these aids for a later period, without further measures, in the case of a region moving yellow to orange or red area. A moratorium on tax and mortgage payments was also introduced.

The COVID-19 crisis had a strong impact on the job prospects of young people. According to the International Labour Organisation, the pandemic had a 'devastating and disproportionate' impact on youth employment. Indeed, the latest data show that young people face great difficulties in continuing their education and studies, seeking employment, and entering the labour market.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, youth unemployment in the EU for 15-24 year olds was 14.9%, down from a peak of 24.4% in 2013. In August 2020, unemployment rate was 17.6%, and was set to rise. In summer 2020 the European Commission's economic forecast predicted a severe recession, with the economy contracting by 8.3% by 2020. To mitigate the impact of the crisis on young people, the Commission proposed in July 2020 the 'Youth Employment Support Package - A Bridge to Work for the Next Generation'.

The Youth Employment Support Package proposed to:

- Promote job placement for young people.
- Prepare education and vocational training for the future.
- Promote apprenticeships.
- Provide further measures to support youth employment.

## 2.2 National measures taken to support young people's well-being

The pandemic has caused negative effects not only under an employment point of view but also from a psychological perspective, especially on children and adolescents. Indeed, recent



research has shown that a complex set of factors including isolation, feelings of uncertainty and parental distress had a negative impact on the mental health of kids and teenagers.

In particular: worsening sleep quality and increased concentration difficulties were seen in younger children, while among adolescents there was an increase in depressive symptoms. The need for relief also led to an increase in certain addictions, such as gambling, video games and pornography.

Two of the aspects perceived as stressful were certainly the isolation and closures of schools. The introduction of Distance Learning did not help either. Besides increasing isolation, research has shown that online teaching has led to a 35% loss of learning.

Many Italian hospitals have witnessed an increase in the number of psychiatric requests for admissions from younger people. Most of them were due to acts of self-harm and attempted suicides, followed by a sharp increase in cases of anorexia and other eating disorder<sup>2</sup>.

To address these critical issues, many European states, including Italy, have promoted policies dedicated to young people to improve their mental well-being. These policies have involved six areas: mental health protection (27 states have initiated activities in this field), education (25), information on the consequences of the pandemic on psychological well-being (22), youth work (16), leisure (15) and sport (10). Italy focused mainly on three sectors: mental health protection; support to information; support to sports and leisure.

The Department for Youth Policies and the Universal Community Service, in collaboration with the public company *Sport e Salute S.p.A* (Sports and Health Ltd.) promoted an initiative called *Spazi Civici di Comunità* (Civic Community Spaces)<sup>3</sup> to provide free access to sports, extra-sports and social activities for young people aged between 14 and 35, including assistance and psychological support to counter the effects of the pandemic and the related youth distress phenomena.

In view of the increase in conditions of depression, anxiety, stress, and psychological fragility, due to the pandemic emergency and the consequent socio-economic crisis, the Italian Government provided the *Bonus Psicologo* (psychologist bonus)<sup>4</sup>

These initiatives were possible thanks to the action of the Ministry of Health, which oversaw the measures.

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<sup>2</sup> Il sole 24 ore, *Il neuropsichiatra: «Il Covid è stato un detonatore, tra i ragazzi è boom di ricoveri»*, 20 aprile 2021, di Barbara Gobbi <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/il-neuropsichiatra-il-covid-e-stato-detonatore-i-ragazzi-e-boom-ricoveri-AEdWQOC>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sportesalute.eu/spazicivici.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.inps.it/it/it/dettaglio-scheda.schede-servizio-strumento.schede-servizi.bonus-psicologo---contributo-per-sostenere-le-spese-relative-a-sessioni-di-psicoterapia-58955.bonus-psicologo---contributo-per-sostenere-le-spese-relative-a-sessioni-di-psicoterapia.html>



One of the measures introduced by the Italian government was the unanimous approval of the motion on mental health initiatives signed by the member of parliament and former Health Minister Beatrice Lorenzin.

The motion commits the government on 32 specific points<sup>5</sup>, and specifically stresses the need to:

- implement a new national mental health plan.
- guarantee access to psychological and psychotherapeutic support.
- ensure up to ten sessions with psychologists for young people depressed because of the pandemic.
- set up specific outpatient clinics within the NHS for the care of so-called “long covid” patients (i.e., individuals who continue to show symptoms even after recovery)<sup>6</sup>

### **2.3 Examples of initiatives at local levels: an interview with a local policy maker - Pier Calogero D’Anna, Mayor of Bompietro**

Bompietro is a small municipality in the province of Palermo, located in the Madonie, the mountains to the East of Palermo. Its mayor, Pier Calogero D’Anna, granted us an interview that allowed us to learn more about the initiative taken by local authorities to face the crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the municipality of Bompietro there was only one total lockdowns, and it was from early March to mid-May 2020, like in the rest of Italy and most of European countries.

Following the first total lockdown, Italy adopted an Anti-covid Zone system using colours:

- Low-risk areas were marked as “yellow”
- Mid-risk areas were marked as “orange”
- High-risk areas were marked as “red”
- Covid-free areas were marked as “white”

Bompietro municipality managed to be Yellow for most of the times and never become Red. They adopted the same measure imposed at national levels with only one difference: they did not allow in town street vendors (e.g. itinerant greengrocers and houseware sellers) from outside. This, besides preventing contagions, resulted also in an advantage for the local sellers.

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<sup>5</sup> ANSA Opg: Lorenzin, chiusi in tutta Italia, giornata storica, 1 agosto 2022,

[https://www.ansa.it/canale\\_saluteebenessere/notizie/sanita/2017/02/20/opg-lorenzin-chiusi-in-tutta-italia-giornata-storica\\_95f8fb29-da98-42c8-a21b-b73e2f2c8182.html](https://www.ansa.it/canale_saluteebenessere/notizie/sanita/2017/02/20/opg-lorenzin-chiusi-in-tutta-italia-giornata-storica_95f8fb29-da98-42c8-a21b-b73e2f2c8182.html)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.iss.it/news/-/asset\\_publisher/gJ3hFqMQsykM/content/long-covid-sintomi-e-presenza-in-carico-dei-pazienti-le-indicazioni-dell-iss](https://www.iss.it/news/-/asset_publisher/gJ3hFqMQsykM/content/long-covid-sintomi-e-presenza-in-carico-dei-pazienti-le-indicazioni-dell-iss)



The local ASP (provincial health authority) organised free screening days, where all the citizens could have a Covid-test for free. The highest recorded peak of infection was 26 people. Besides, no deaths due to covid have been reported during the whole pandemic.

According to Pier Calogero D'Anna, and in the light of the above statistics, these measures were effective in preventing and limiting contagions.

Most of the negative aspects were reported on the social sphere, especially among young people. Besides some psychological problems were reported. Most of these problems occurred at the beginning of the pandemic outbreak and were connected to the fear of something still unknown, as Covid-19 was a completely new virus.

Bompietro's mayor reports that restrictions were not uniformly accepted by all citizens, and not always accepted willingly. However they were respected by everyone and there was a good level of cooperation among authorities and citizens.

### **Measures taken to deal with the aftermath of the lockdown.**

During and after the lockdown Bompietro municipality allocated some resources to help those commercial activities that were mostly affected by it, by setting up a dedicated fund.

During the lockdown many young people joined charity and volunteer organisations to give their help to the community. For example, they took part in sanitisation operations. This resulted in an increase of civic engagement that fostered a sense of community and at the same time allowed people, especially young people, to get out of their houses and meet other people, in the respect of the safety measures.

Last but not least, some people benefited from measures taken at national level to promote employment and psychological support. However, these measures would have been more useful if they had been taken over the long term.

### **Initiatives from citizens and cooperation with local authorities.**

Pier Calogero D'Anna, mayor of Bompietro, reports that there was a great cooperation and synergy between citizens and local authorities. Here are some examples:

- 1) At some point during the pandemic there was a shortage of facemasks. The municipalities ordered fabric to produce masks them and those people among the citizens who were able to sew and tailor helped to make the facemasks.
- 2) During the highest peak of Covid-19 pandemic Bompietro municipality was left with an insufficient number of traffic policemen available. The municipality was helped by groups of volunteers who took responsibility for carrying out the necessary checks.



- 3) Finally, there was a great cooperation from the workers of the local community service, who agreed to help quarantined people to carry out all those daily activities that were precluded to them due to forced isolation (for example, shopping for food or carrying out simple bureaucratic errands).

The full interview can be downloaded from [here](#).



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### 3 Feedback from the target group.

In order to tackle the consequences of the pandemic, in addition to the commitment of the individual Member States like Italy, the European Commission designated 2022 as the European Year of Youth<sup>7</sup>, to recognise the sacrifices made by young people during the COVID-19 pandemic. A Flash Eurobarometer survey from May 2022 shows that young people in 16 of the 27 Member States consider improving mental and physical health and well-being the most important priority for the European Year of Youth. Through a dedicated Vocal Platform<sup>8</sup>, the European Commission listened to young people and asked them to share their opinions, concerns, and ideas. Of all the voices registered in the category 'Health, Well-being and Sport', one third used the platform to ask for more awareness-raising around mental health issues and to access the services of professionals, such as psychologists, at an affordable cost.

#### 3.1 A survey about the effectiveness of measures taken to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 crisis.

##### What restrictions have been adopted to reduce contagions at national level?

For **90,3%** of the respondents, the compulsory use of facemasks indoor.

For **80,6%** the compulsory use of facemasks even outdoor.

For **90,3%** a ban on gatherings.

For **45,2%** the anti-covid zones system.

For **54,8%** a partial lockdown.

For **83,9%** a total lockdown.

##### What restrictions have been adopted to reduce contagions at national level?

For **83,9%** of the respondents, the compulsory use of facemasks indoor.

For **64,5%** of the respondents, the compulsory use of facemasks outdoor.

For **87,1%** ban on gatherings.

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<sup>7</sup> European Year of Youth Website: [https://youth.europa.eu/year-of-youth\\_en](https://youth.europa.eu/year-of-youth_en)

<sup>8</sup> European Year of Youth Vocal Platform: <https://voices.youth.europa.eu/#/>



For **35,5%** anti-covid zone system.

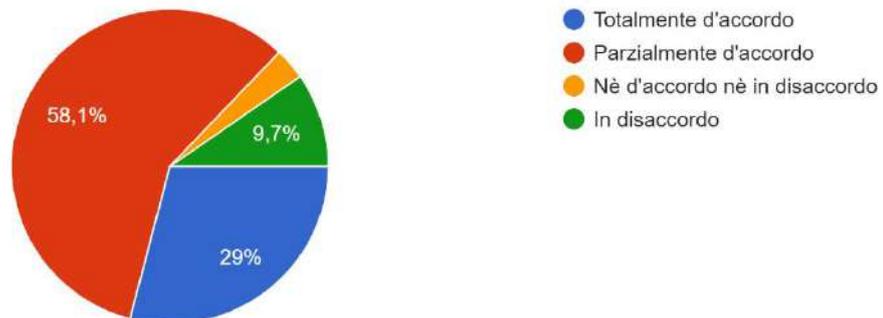
For **52,6%** partial lockdown.

For **74,2%** total lockdown.

**Do you think these measures helped to prevent contagions.**

Le misure adottate sono servite a prevenire i contagi?

31 risposte



**58,1%** of the respondents partially agrees with this statement.

**29%** totally agrees with this statement.

**9,7%** disagrees with this statement.

**3,2%** does not agree or disagree.



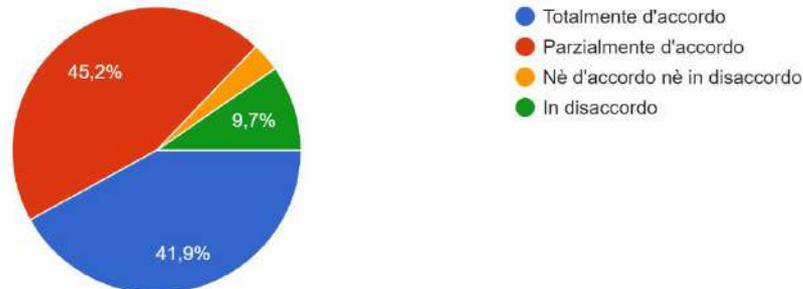
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## Did restrictions negatively affect your life?

Le restrizioni hanno influenzato la tua vita negativamente?

31 risposte



**45,2%** partially agrees.

**41,9%** totally agrees.

**9,7%** disagrees.

**3,2%** does not agree or disagree.

**If the answer to the above question is positive, which aspects of your life have been most affected?**

**61,3%** of the respondents experienced **psychological problems**.

**22,6%** experienced **physical health problems**.

**67,7%** experienced **social related problems**.

**32,3%** experienced **economic problems**.

**19,4%** experienced **educational problems**.



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**Following the lifting of restrictions, what kind of measures has your local government taken to tackle the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis?**

According to the **9,7%** of the respondents, Additional income support for young people were introduced.

For **6,5%** there was a promotion of work-based learning opportunities, apprenticeships, traineeships, and internships.

**22,6%** noted a promotion of educational opportunities for young people and of financial support to access them.

**16,1%** witnessed a strengthening of employment services for young people.

According to the **12,9%** there was an introduction of public subsidies to encourage the recruitment of young people.

For the **41,9%** there was a strengthening of mental health services and a financial support to access them.

**Following the lifting of restrictions, what kind of measures has your national government taken to address the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis?**

According to the **16,1%** of the respondents, Additional income support for young people were introduced.

For **9,7%** there was a promotion of work-based learning opportunities, apprenticeships, traineeships, and internships.

**16,1%** noted a promotion of educational opportunities for young people and of financial support to access them.

**12,9%** witnessed a strengthening of employment services for young people.

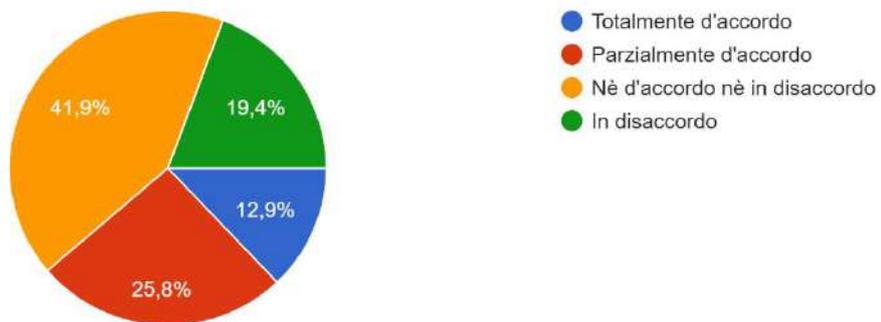


According to the **22,6%** there was an introduction of public subsidies to encourage the recruitment of young people.

For the **54,8%** there was a strengthening of mental health services and a financial support to access them.

**Have measures taken at the national level had an impact at the local level in your community?**

Le misure adottate a livello nazionale, hanno avuto un impatto a livello locale sulla tua comunità?  
31 risposte



**41,9%** of the respondents does not agree or disagree.

**25,8%** partially agrees.

**19,4%** disagrees.

**12,9%** totally agrees.

**What measures have you benefited from?**

Of all the 31 respondents tot he questionnaire, only 2 of them managed to get access and benefit from these measures.

One respondent benefitted from a scholarship that helped him to go on with his studies, while another one simply says “Yes“ without specifying what kind of support he received.



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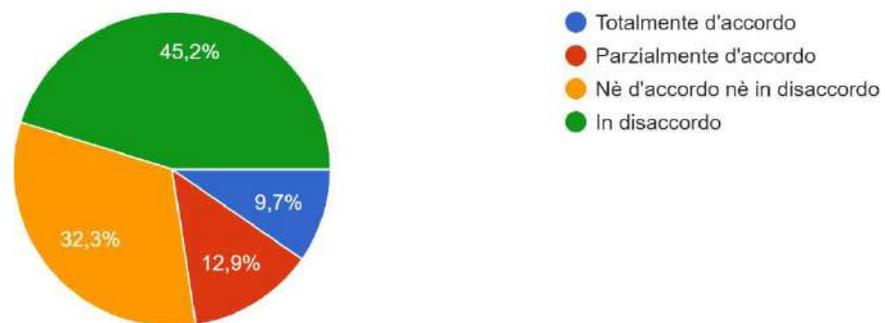
Among the most significant negative answers there are:

- No, I didn't need it, but getting access was extremely difficult because the minimum requirements are extremely restrictive.
- No, despite having applied for psychological support.

### Did actions taken at the local level incorporate the views of young people?

Le misure adottate a livello locale hanno tenuto conto delle opinioni dei giovani?

31 risposte



45,2% of the respondents disagrees.

32,2% does not agree or disagree.

12,9% partially agrees.

9,7% totally agrees.

### Did actions taken at the national level incorporate the views of young people?

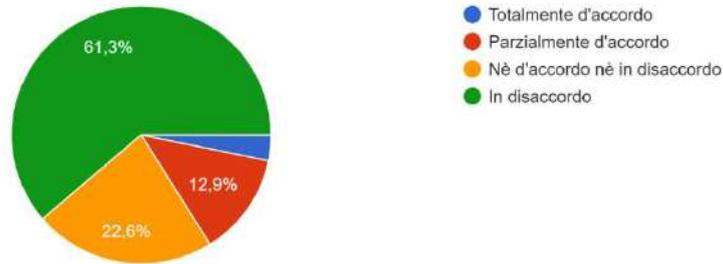


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Le misure adottate a livello nazionale hanno tenuto conto delle opinioni dei giovani?

31 risposte



**61,3%** disagrees.

**22,6%** does not agree or disagree.

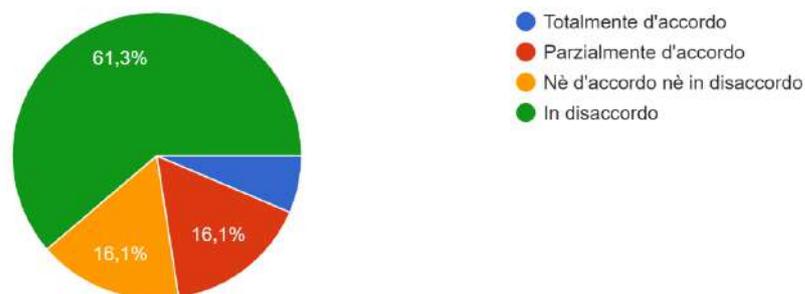
**12,9%** partially agrees.

**3,2%** totally agrees.

**Have local authorities taken young people's views into account and asked them to contribute to determining what measures should be taken to help them?**

Le autorità locali hanno preso in considerazione l'opinione dei giovani e hanno chiesto loro di dare un contributo nel determinare le misure da adottare per aiutarli?

31 risposte



**61,3%** disagrees.

**16,1%** does not agree or disagree.



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16,1% partially agrees.

6,5% totally agrees.

### **What did they do or what could they have done?**

Most of the respondents agree that young people should have been more involved in decision-making processes. Among the most significant answer we can include:

- Conducting interviews, surveys, focus groups and round tables to gather most of their opinion.
- They could have taken measures to encourage companies to hire or to foster the opening of companies. In part these measures existed since before the pandemic (e.g., Invitalia) but post-pandemic they could have been enhanced and made more accessible.
- Take into account the needs of people who live in the most remote areas.
- Tax breaks and interest-free loans for young people under 30, support to young entrepreneurship, measures to increase youth employment, paid internships, financial contributions for young people who want to participate in sports, music and the arts, free psychological support.

On the other hand, a small minority thinks that restrictions were the only way to end the pandemic. Among the most significant answers:

- Authorities demanded compliance with the rules enforced to end the pandemic as soon as possible and avoid the spread of contagions.
- It was a totally out of the ordinary situation and there were many inconsistencies, such as having to wear a mask as a business employee while customers were not required to. This caused me to experience every moment of work in a state of total anxiety that led me to sleep on the couch for a long time for fear of infecting my family members (I worked in a busy restaurant). I don't know what we could have done but certainly to penalise some activities over others was not the right move, e.g., cinemas and theatres.



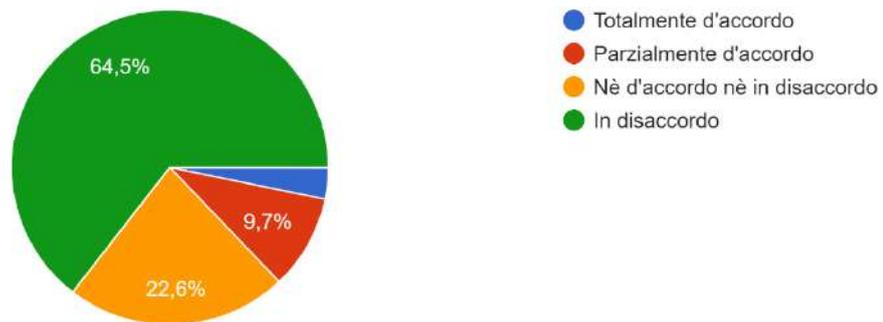
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## Have national authorities taken young people's views into account and asked them to contribute to determining what measures should be taken to help them?

Le autorità nazionali hanno preso in considerazione l'opinione dei giovani e hanno chiesto loro di dare un contributo nel determinare le misure da adottare per aiutarli?

31 risposte



64,5% disagrees.

22,6% does not agree or disagree.

9,7% partially agrees.

3,2% totally agrees.

### What did they do or what could they have done?

The answers to these questions are very similar to those give above. Among the most significant, concerning measures that could have been taken at local level:

- Involving student representatives in decisions of their interest.
- They could have carried out (at local level) surveys or talked to representatives of the category (members and representatives of provincial student councils, university representatives and various stakeholders such as ANG and ANPAL).



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**What other measures do you think the local government should have implemented to tackle the COVID-19 crisis?**

**71%** thinks that additional income support for young people was needed.

**48,4%** thinks that work-based learning opportunities, apprenticeships, traineeships and internships should have been promoted.

**61,3%** thinks that promoting educational opportunities for young people and provide them with financial support to access them was necessary.

**67,7%** think local government should have strengthen employment services for young people.

**64,5%** thinks should have been introduced public subsidies to encourage the recruitment of young people.

**51,6%** thinks that mental health services should have been strengthened, and at the same time providing financial support for accessing them.

**What other measures do you think the national government should have implemented to tackle the COVID-19 crisis?**

**71%** thinks that additional income support for young people was needed.

**51,6%** thinks that work-based learning opportunities, apprenticeships, traineeships and internships should have been promoted.

**61,3%** thinks that promoting educational opportunities for young people and provide them with financial support to access them was necessary.

**71%** think local government should have strengthen employment services for young people.

**61,3%** thinks should have been introduced public subsidies to encourage the recruitment of young people.

**51,6%** thinks that mental health services should have been strengthened, and at the same time providing financial support for accessing them.



### 3.2 A small group interview with 4 young people from Centro TAU in Palermo

The respondents to the above survey come from a very diverse social background. Following the survey, we decided to get in touch with a local youth organisation working with fragile young people, to organise a small group interview and receive relevant feedback from the most disadvantaged representatives of our target group.

The Youth organisation involved is Centro TAU, a voluntary association based in the Zisa neighbourhood, one of the poorest in the city of Palermo, who provides educational and social support to fragile young people and their families. The activities they carry out include: fighting educational poverty; spreading the culture of legality; after-school activities, both recreational (sports, arts and music) and study support.

#### The participants

The participants to the group interview were 4 young people from Centro TAU and one youth worker, Rosario, who was there to help the interviewer.

Young people were:

- Rathusika, 14 years old
- Mavelos, 14 years old
- Andrea, 14 years old
- Umberto, 21 years old

#### Forward

It is important to mention that this interview took place in August 2023, three years after the end of the first total lockdown. At the time of the interview the almost totality of the restrictions is no longer in force and, in the perception of the participants, the COVID time is long gone. Besides, considering the social background of the participants, some of the problems that they faced are still affecting them, as they were even before the pandemic outbreak.

#### The interview

The complete transcription of the group interview can be downloaded from [here](#).

When asked to think about the first total lockdown and the immediate aftermath, most of them think of the distance learning, as  $\frac{3}{4}$  of them are students. The older one, Umberto, thinks of freedom, as he recalls the end of the lockdown instead of the lockdown itself.

When asked to think about the immediate aftermath of the lockdown, these are the most relevant statement:



1. They still think about the distance learning, as this situation persisted until the end of 2021. They found it particularly difficult to keep studying online as they could not get the necessary educational support.
2. They think about the fear of something that was still unknown (the virus itself).

Then they were asked if they were aware of the different kind aids provided by the national and local authorities to overcome the problems generated by the restrictions. The most significant data is that they were not even aware of most of those support measures.

They all benefitted from bonuses for the purchase of primary necessity goods (grocery). However, this type of support is specific to families with economic difficulties and is not strictly related to post-covid measures.

None of the participants, not even Umberto who is 21 years old and in search of first employment, was aware of any internship possibility or any grant for companies to allow hirings.

Finally, nobody ever heard of the so-called psychologist bonus, the contribution to benefit from psychotherapy for free.

Finally, we asked their opinion about the effectiveness of the measures taken to tackle the negative effects of the restrictions, and what could have been done more.

They all agree on the fact that there was a great lack of communication, as they were not even aware of all the available possibilities.



## 4 Final Words

As highlighted by this research, that the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the younger population extends beyond merely health issues. It significantly influenced their employment perspectives, education, general welfare, social interactions, and overall quality of life, along with posing severe limitation on democratic participation and civic engagement.

At national level, the measures taken to tackle the negative effects of the pandemic on young people, have certainly been a concrete help to the population, especially its most fragile segments but, as the results of the interviews show, a very small percentage of people has been able to access them. This happened for two reasons: on the one hand, the requirements for access to this aid were too restrictive; on the other hand, the existence of such measures was not adequately advertised, as a result many people were not even aware of them.

Additionally, the interview with the mayor of the municipality of Bompietro (associated partner in this project) provided us with valuable insights from local policymakers, enriching our comprehension of the challenges municipalities faced in navigating the complexities of the COVID-19 crisis. It became evident that a collaborative and comprehensive approach is paramount to address the diverse dimensions of the crisis's effects on young people.

The information shared by our target group, particularly those from the most vulnerable segments of society, highlight the necessity for more comprehensive, long-lasting, and targeted interventions and, most importantly, an effective communication of the available measures.

Despite three years already passed since the outbreak of the pandemic, and more than a year since the end of the state of emergency in Italy, the consequences of the restrictions are still visible on the younger segments of the population, especially the most fragile ones. Precisely for this reason, in the next phases of this project, we will conduct an investigation on the existing good practices and social innovations implemented in the past to overcome moments of crisis, which may serve as an example to elaborate new ones.



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**Project 101091233 - So I BeLiv**

**Research how the local communities reacted  
to the COVID-19 crisis  
National report Croatia**



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# 1 . Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis has had a major impact on society as a whole at a global level. Its effects were not only felt in the field of health (both physical and mental), but also in social, economic and financial terms, in employment, education, politics, civic engagement, and even in the way we experience leisure. From the view of health issues, youth (18-30) was not affected by the pandemic in a great deal, but went through the same democratic and civic restrictions which had an immense impact on their employment and education, health, wellbeing and lifestyle, which might lead to even worse civic and democratic participation of young people on local/national/European levels.

After the first part of this project, during which the partners investigated the effect that Covid-19 pandemic and the aftermath of lockdown had on several aspects of young people's lives, we now move on and try to analyze how national and local government reacted to this emergency and what actions were taken in order to mitigate these effects. The aim is to use received data to form proposals on how to tackle socio-economic issues resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and other potential future global or national crises.

During the first part of this report, we are going to see what measures have been adopted and what actions were taken by the Croatian national government in order to tackle the negative effects that post-pandemic crises had on young people. Then we are going to analyze what local governments did, and if there were any differences among National and local policies. For this purpose we interviewed Tomislav Travčić, member of the City Council of the City of Šibenik whose municipality is associated partner in this project.

Finally, we are going to analyze what our target group, young people, think about the measures adopted and the actions taken at local and national level, and if they consider such measures effective or not. For this purpose, we are going to analyze the results of a survey submitted to a sample of 30 young people



We also conducted an interview in the form of a focus-group with a small group of 5 fragile young people living in Croatia during the pandemic.

## 2. How local community reacted to COVID-19 crisis

### 2.1. National measures taken to cope with the crisis generated by COVID-19

In 2020, the world faced a major pandemic caused by the spread of a virus with SARS-Cov-2. In that first year, there was no country or nation that was bypassed by this virus and lockdown was widely introduced as a virus protection measure. The virus itself, a then the measures that were carried out are great changed the lives of all generations, not only young people.

According to the University of Oxford, at the end of March 2020, Croatia was among the countries with the strictest restrictions and measures to reduce infection with the new coronavirus.

The Government of the Republic of Croatia has opened a website for citizens at [www.koronavirus.hr](http://www.koronavirus.hr) and a special telephone number 113 for information about the coronavirus. Also, the Stop COVID-19 mobile application was presented.

The coronavirus pandemic brought uncertainty and various types of losses to the citizens of the Republic of Croatia, and the measures implemented to prevent the spread of the epidemic included limited freedom of movement. During that period, many were limited in their contacts with their friends and relatives and were worried about preserving their own jobs. In order to help citizens face these challenges, the Croatian Psychological Chamber, in cooperation with the Croatian Psychological Society and county psychological societies, activated a network of telephone lines for psychological help in the period from March to June 2020. There was also a phone line for psychological support for high school graduates due to the perceived need to provide psychological support to that group, since most schools in the Republic of Croatia do not meet the minimum requirements of the state pedagogical standard and do not have a full-time



psychologist employed. In this way, psychological support became available to all high school graduates in the Republic of Croatia. The reasons for reporting were different, for example learning difficulties, time management, emotional relief, help in solving problems, concrete advice, support, comfort, appeasement and the like.

The Government of the Republic of Croatia adopted a package of measures to help the economy due to the coronavirus epidemic. There are a total of 63 of them, and their main goal is to preserve jobs and pay salaries (postponement of the payment of income tax and profit tax and salary contributions, approval of new loans for liquidity to economic entities for financing salaries, overheads and other basic business expenses, "COVID-19 loans" for working capital for small and medium-sized entrepreneurs, postponement of the payment of the tourist membership fee for business entities and private renters, as well as the payment of the tourist tax for private renters ).

Also, the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia adopted a number of measures to support the cultural sector, and within the first rebalancing, HRK 48 million was provided for the Crisis Fund to support the cultural and media sector and HRK 35 million for the implementation of the call for submission of project proposals Art and Culture Online, which is co-financed by the European Social Fund.

Young people, who had to adapt to many new changes, then were most under attack. Since in the Republic of Croatia in the group young people include people from 15 to 30 years old, young people did not have a problem only of adaptation within the education system, but the pandemic brought with it the problem of workers' rights and housing, and it had the greatest impact on the establishment and maintenance of social contacts and the mental health of young people.

The organization of time for young people does not include only free time (engl. *leisure*), time spent playing, resting or entertainment, but the organization of time includes time spent in education institutions (primary and secondary schools, music schools, universities), at work, at sports training and events, informal education, cultural and musical, and so on. With the introduction of lockdown of educational institutions and



all accompanying extracurricular/optional contents and activities were impossible for young people.

Original errors directed towards young people began to correct themselves so that are different actors, from local levels to national and world institutions started take numerous steps (which they continue to take) with the aim of researching the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of young people, as well as steps necessary to promote their conservation mental health. UNICEF Croatia thus focused on providing concrete information about the pandemic, advice on how to protect your own mental health and critically check and share information about the pandemic, advice on how to protect your own mental health and critically check and share information about the pandemic. A national survey was also conducted of the Central State Office for Demography and young people in cooperation with the Institute for Social research in Zagreb during which In 2021, the opinion of young people was examined about the impact of the COVID-19 disease on quality of life, the future of the European Union and support senior citizens. The young people who participated in the research state that today's generation feels deprived compared to previous generations (bans and impossibility of going out, travel, celebrations, quality education, dating).

## **2.2 Examples of initiatives at local levels: an interview with a local policy maker - Tomislav Travčić, member of the City Council of the City of Šibenik**

County of Šibenik-Knin and City of Šibenik helped with making sure that its citizens were aware of all that was happening by providing the information on their website and Facebook page. They shared relevant information and web pages dedicated to the COVID-19 pandemic. They also promoted mental health support in epidemiological situations by making sure citizens knew which phone number to call for help. They also established their own call line intended for all those citizens who, due to measures to contain the spread of coronavirus or possible infection, are unable, forbidden or unwilling to leave



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their homes and are unable to provide themselves, or through the help of relatives, friends and acquaintances, with the most essential food, hygiene items, medicines or other emergency items. Grad Šibenik, with the help of local voluntary and humanitarian organizations, and by supporting civic initiatives ("One for others - Šibenik") provided the most urgent care in a way that minimized contact between aid providers and aid seekers with the aim of helping citizens to prevent the spread of infection.

Despite all the above, measures had negative effects on some aspects of young people's lives. In order to get feedback on how the measures affected the lives of young people in the area of the City of Šibenik and Šibenik-Knin County, we conducted an interview with Tomislav Travčić, a member of the City Council of the City of Šibenik.

During the interview with a local policy maker he confirmed the supposition that city and county government had no level of autonomy in adapting the national restrictions. City and county government had to enforce the restrictions if they liked them or not. The only form of autonomy of local and county governments was shown in the way that the government sent amendments to the Trade Act to the Parliament, which enable the county headquarters of civil protection to regulate the working hours of shops in their area in special circumstances, such as now, during the coronavirus epidemic.

Decision-maker also expressed the view that the introduced measures were only partially effective in limiting infections, and the citizens themselves in the area of Šibenik-Knin County did not voluntarily accept the adopted measures. Despite this, there was cooperation from citizens with local authorities to limit infections, albeit only partially.

The decision-maker believes that the measures taken had a negative effect on other aspects of young people's lives, namely on physical health, mental health, economic and social aspects of their lives. Because of all this, young people have lost trust in local authorities.

According to the decision-maker, the only measure aimed at young people in order to combat the negative effects of the quarantine on young people was additional income support for young people, and it is necessary to continue to carry out psychological



assistance activities for young people, as well as various other activities in the local environment that will help young people to adapt to the "world of adults".

[Interview template here](#)

## 2 Feedback from target group

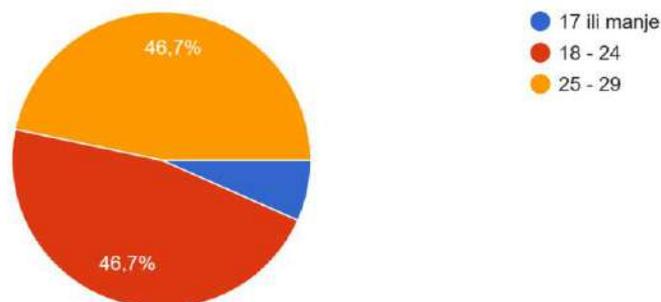
To determine the effectiveness of measures taken to mitigate the COVID-19 crisis, we surveyed 30 young people between the ages 17 and 29 with an online questionnaire. With an online questionnaire we looked back and reflected on the measures taken to mitigate the COVID-19 crisis and their effectiveness from the target group. The questionnaire was anonymous and distributed among members and users of various services of the Youth Association "Youth in the EU" and also distributed online (through social media, and web pages of the Slovenian project partner and associated partner) to anyone within the target group interested in participation.

### 3.1. Demographic information

#### Age of the participant

Koliko imate godina?

30 odgovora



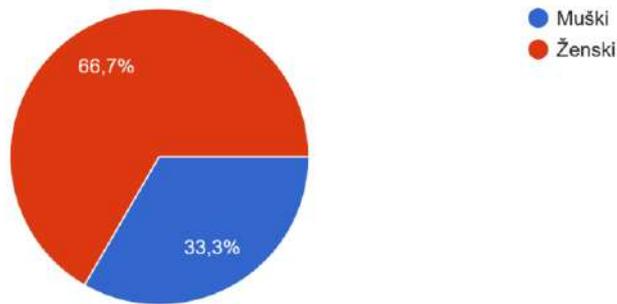
#### Gender of the participant



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Spol  
30 odgovora

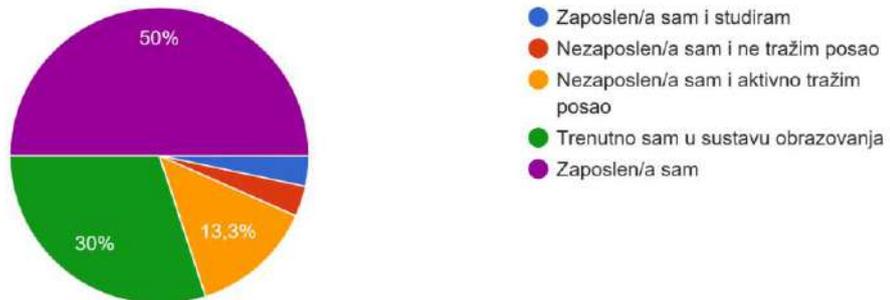


66.7 % female

33.3 % male

### Current status of the participant

Trenutni status  
30 odgovora



- I am employed and studying - 3,3%
- I am unemployed and not looking for a job - 3,3 %
- I am unemployed and actively looking for a job - 13,3%
- I am currently in the education system - 30%
- I am employed - 50%

### Last completed level of education



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### Posljednja završena razina obrazovanja

30 odgovora



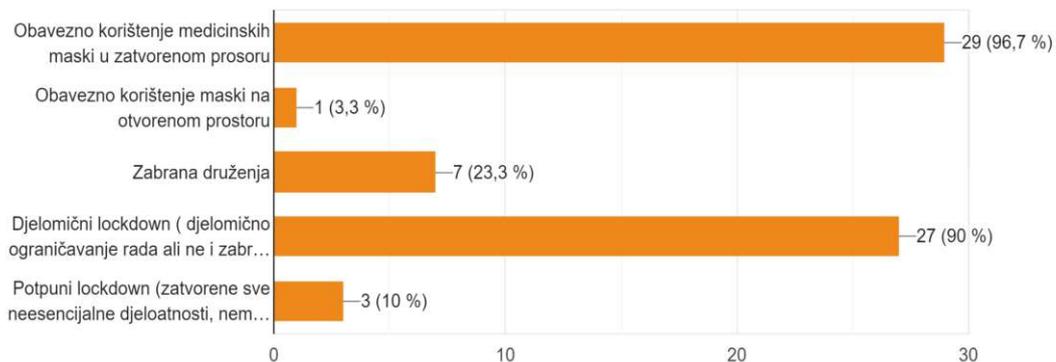
- Elementary School - 6,7%
- High school education - 50%
- Higher professional education (University undergraduate study, professional undergraduate study) - 23,3%
- Higher professional education (University graduate study, specialist graduate study, specialist graduate study) - 16,7%
- Master's degree/PhD - 3,3%

## 3.2. Feedback

### What restrictions has your national government taken to reduce infection?

Koja je ograničenja poduzela vaša nacionalna vlada kako bi smanjila zarazu?

30 odgovora

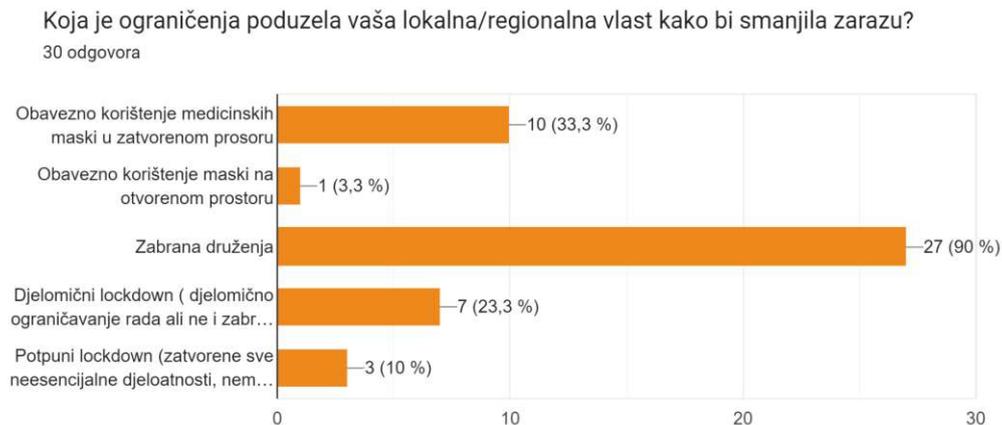


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- Mandatory use of medical masks indoors - 96,7 %
- Mandatory use of masks in open space - 3,3 %
- Prohibition of socializing - 23,3 %
- Partial lockdown (partial restriction of work but not a ban, prohibition of alcohol sales, prohibition of organizing events, restriction of gatherings, recommendation to reduce travel, but the same is not prohibited ) - 90 %
- Complete lockdown (all non-essential activities closed, inability to travel between cities, etc.) - 10 %

### What restrictions has your local/regional authority taken to reduce the spread of the virus?



- Mandatory use of medical masks indoors - 33,3 %
- Mandatory use of masks in open space - 3,3 %
- Prohibition of socializing - 90 %
- Partial lockdown (partial restriction of work but not a ban, prohibition of alcohol sales, prohibition of organizing events, restriction of gatherings, recommendation to reduce travel, but the same is not prohibited ) - 23,3 %
- Complete lockdown (all non-essential activities closed, inability to travel between cities, etc.) - 10 %



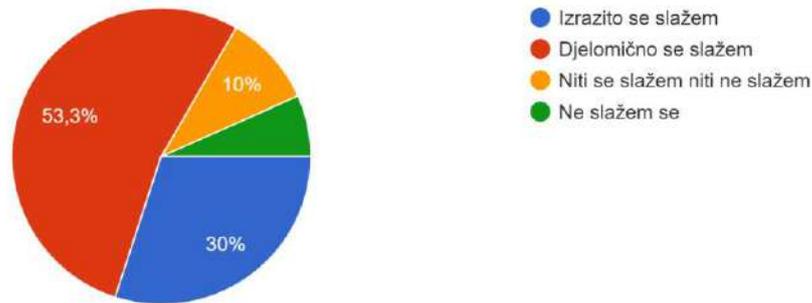
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## Did the measures taken achieve their goal of preventing the spread of infection?

Jesu li poduzete mjere postigle svoj cilj sprječavanja širenja zaraze?

30 odgovora

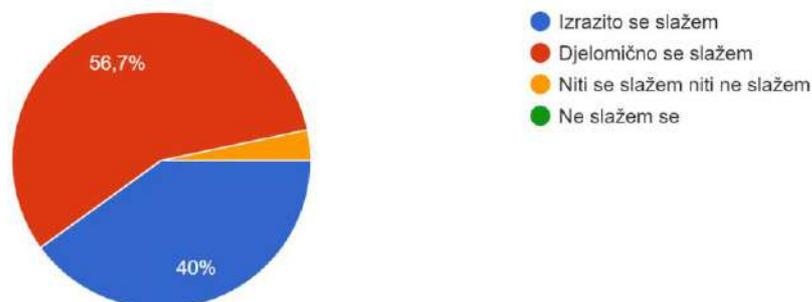


- I strongly agree - 30 %
- I partially agree - 53,3 %
- I neither agree nor disagree - 10 %
- I disagree - 6,7 %

## Have restrictions negatively affected your life?

Ograničenja su negativno utjecala na vaš život?

30 odgovora



- I strongly agree - 40 %



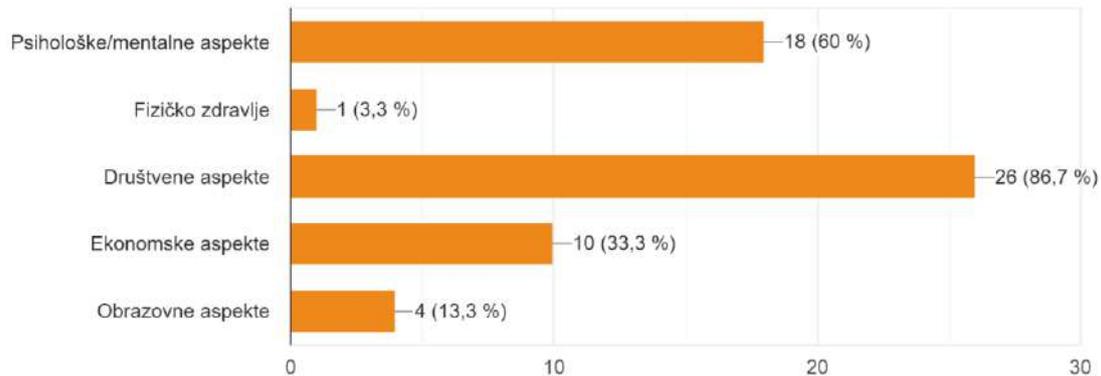
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- I partially agree - 56,7 %
- I neither agree nor disagree - 3,3 %
- I disagree - 0 %

### If so, what aspects of your life have the pandemic affected the most?

Ako je tako, na koje aspekte vašeg života je pandemija najviše utjecala?  
30 odgovora



- Psychological/mental aspects - 60%
- Physical health - 3,3%
- Social aspects - 86,7 %
- Economic aspects - 33,3%
- Educational aspects - 13,3 %

### Following the lifting of restrictions, what measures has your local/regional government taken to tackle the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis?



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Nakon ukidanja ograničenja, kakve je mjere poduzela vaša lokalna/regionalna uprava kako bi se uhvatila u koštac s negativnim učincima krize izazvane COVID-19?

30 odgovora



- Additional income support for young people - 0%
- Encouraging young people to take internships - 0%
- Encouraging educational opportunities for young people - 3,3%
- Additional employment services (information, incentives, etc.) - 6,7%
- Giving incentives to employers to employ young people - 6,7%
- Encouraging services in the field of mental health - 3,3%
- Nothing - 76,7 %
- I do not know - 3,3 %

**Following the lifting of restrictions, what measures has your local/regional government taken to tackle the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis?**

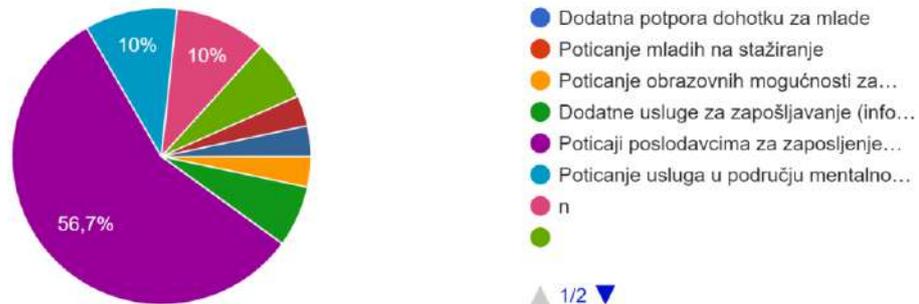


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Nakon ukidanja ograničenja, kakve je mjere poduzela vaša nacionalna vlada kako bi se uhvatila u koštac s negativnim učincima krize izazvane COVID-19?

30 odgovora



- Additional income support for young people - 0%
- Encouraging young people to take internships - 0%
- Encouraging educational opportunities for young people - 3,3%
- Additional employment services (information, incentives, etc.) - 6,7%
- Giving incentives to employers to employ young people - 56,7%
- Encouraging services in the field of mental health - 10%
- Nothing - 13,3%
- I do not know - 10%

### Which measures have you personally benefited from?

All 30 respondents, when asked about which measures they personally benefited from, gave a unified answer that they did not personally benefit from the mentioned measures.

### Have measures taken at national level had an impact on life in your local area?

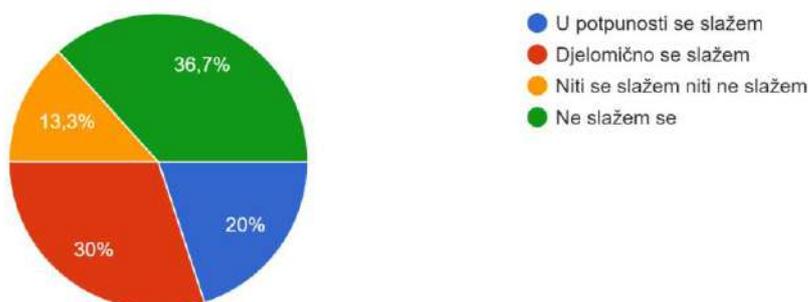


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Jesu li mjere poduzete na nacionalnoj razini imale utjecaja na život u vašoj lokanoj sredini?

30 odgovora

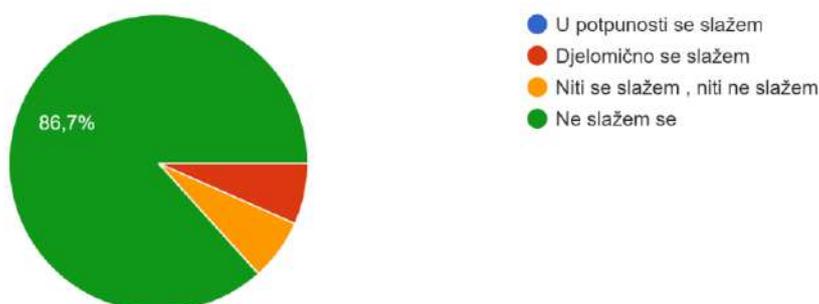


- I strongly agree - 20 %
- I partially agree - 30 %
- I neither agree nor disagree - 13,3 %
- I disagree -36,7%

## Do you think that local/regional government policies during and after the lockdown took into account the real needs of young people?

Smatrate li da su politike lokalne/regionalne vlasti tijekom i nakon lockdowna uzimale u obzir stvarne potrebe mladih?

30 odgovora



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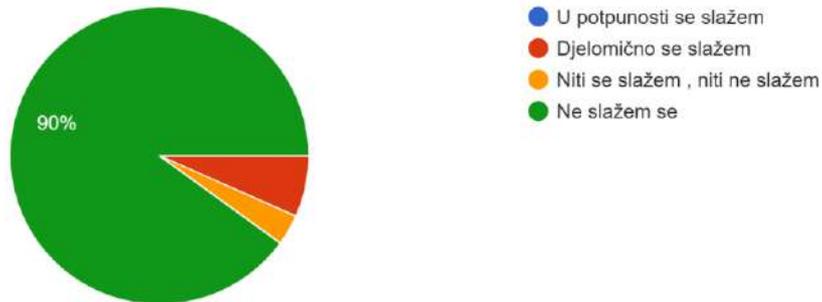
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I strongly agree - 0 %  
I partially agree - 6,7 %  
I neither agree nor disagree - 6,7 %  
I disagree -86,7%

## Do you think that the policies of the national government during and after the lockdown took into account the real needs of young people?

Smatrate li da su politike nacionalna vlada tijekom i nakon lockdowna uzimale u obzir stvarne potrebe mladih?

30 odgovora



I strongly agree - 0 %  
I partially agree - 6,7 %  
I neither agree nor disagree - 3,3 %  
I disagree - 90%

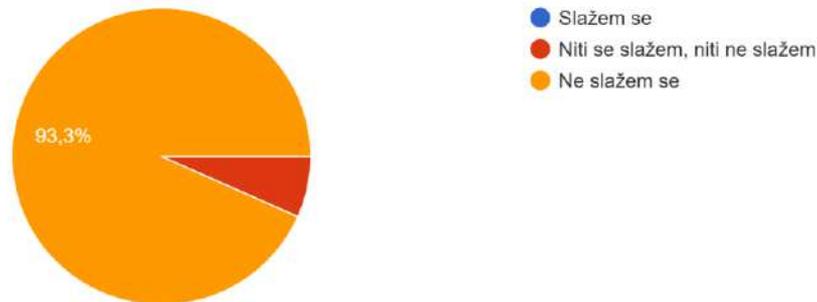


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Smatrate li da su lokalne/regionalne vlasti prikupili mišljenja mladih po pitanju politika za mlade nakon završetka restriktivnih mjera?

30 odgovora



I strongly agree - 0 %

I partially agree - 6,7 %

I neither agree nor disagree - 0 %

I disagree - 93,3%

### **What youth policies were implemented? And if not, which do you think should have been implemented?**

Three respondents gave feedback on the above question that there should have been more ways to socialize and free choice for lockdown. Young people should be guided more and provided with as many places as possible for work and training and a career path for their first job. But in general, nobody asks young people much.

### **What other measures do you think your local/regional government should have implemented to tackle the COVID-19 crisis?**

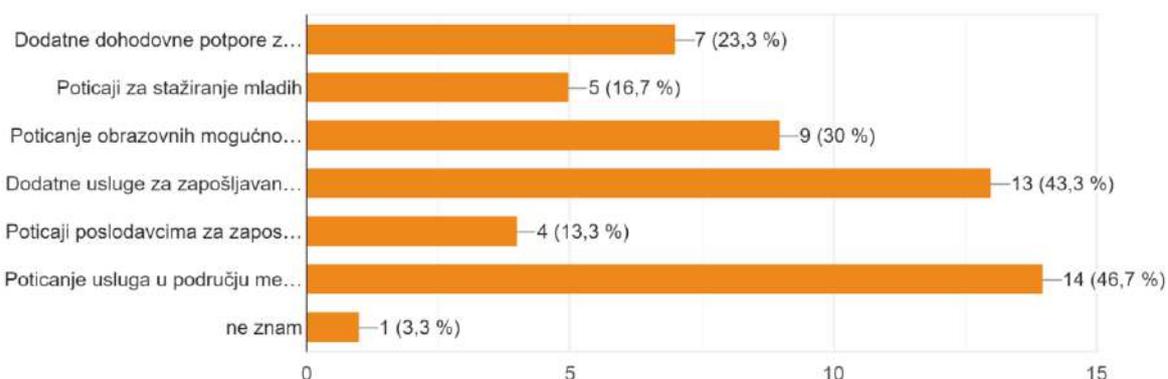


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Što mislite, koje je druge mjere trebala provesti vaša lokalna/regionalna uprava kako bi se uhvatila u koštac s krizom COVID-19?

30 odgovora



Additional income support for young people - 23,3 %

Encouraging young people to take internships - 16,7 %

Encouraging educational opportunities for young people - 30 %

Additional employment services (information, incentives, etc.) - 43,3%

Giving incentives to employers to employ young people - 13,3 %

Encouraging services in the field of mental health - 46,7

I do not know - 3,3 %

**What other measures do you think your national government should have implemented to tackle the crisis caused by COVID-19?**

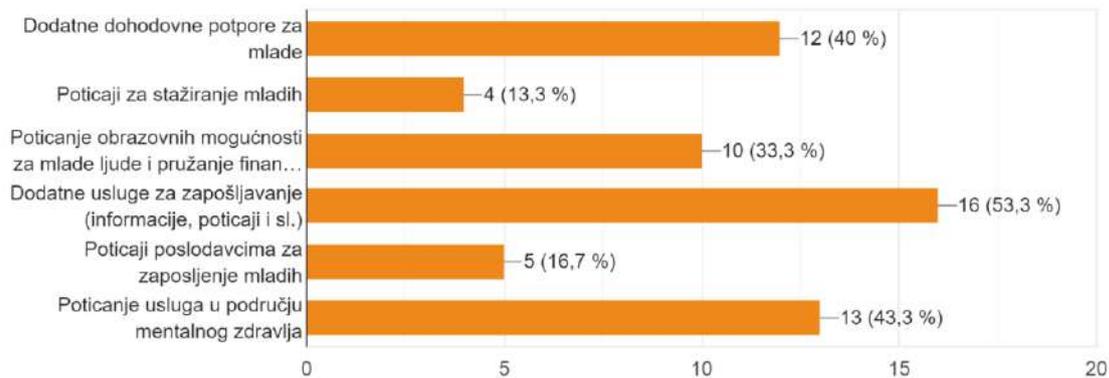


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Što mislite, koje je druge mjere trebala provesti vaša nacionalna vlada kako bi se uhvatila u koštac s krizom izazvanom COVID-19?

30 odgovora



Additional income support for young people - 40 %

Encouraging young people to take internships - 13,3 %

Encouraging educational opportunities for young people and providing financial support for access to the same - 33,3 %

Additional employment services (information, incentives, etc.) - 53,3%

Giving incentives to employers to employ young people - 16,7 %

Encouraging services in the field of mental health - 43,3

### 3.3. A small group interview with 5 young people

In order to get further feedback what measures have been adopted and what actions were taken by the Croatian national/local government in order to tackle the negative effects that post-pandemic crisis had on young people we organized and implemented an interview in the form of a focus-group with a small group of 5 fragile young people living in Croatia during the pandemic.

The focus group was led by Sanja Barišić, coordinator of activities for young people in the Youth Association "Youth in the EU", who also holds a master's degree in Croatian language and literature and philosophy education.

## Participants of group interview/focus group

- Antonio Dujić - 18, finished high school, unemployed
- Giovanna La Gala, 26, university graduate, employed
- Jakov Ambrošić 27, university graduate, unemployed
- Klara Mrčela, 25, currently a student at the Faculty of Law
- Catarina Rende Dominis, 26 university graduate, employed

When we asked **how their community was affected by the lockdown** they pointed out that, especially during the first lockdown, they feared for the health of their elderly household members who already had certain health problems, but they also feared for their own health and tried to limit contacts as much as possible. Respondents who were in the education system during the pandemic (college and high school) pointed out that they missed a lot of opportunities, both in terms of social life and the quality of education. According to them, online education is quite different from the one that was conducted live, and they felt "ashamed" to ask the professors some questions that they had, which they would have asked them without much hesitation if the classes had been live maintenance. After the third lockdown, they were quite exhausted and had a feeling of "psychic bursting".

In addition to negative experiences, respondents also expressed positive experiences, including; spending more quality free time, devoting more time to themselves and their hobbies for which they did not have time before, improving the digitization system of classes, citizens because of the experience of life in extreme conditions began to engage more in the community (volunteering, involvement in the work of associations, civic actions, staying in nature, etc.). One participant pointed out that it was the experience of the Covid crisis that motivated her to volunteer in the European Solidarity Corps, a new EU initiative for young people.



Furthermore, when **asked about the type of measures taken by the government** (local or national) they listed only a few measures, such as support to preserve jobs (subsidizing wages) and the epidemiological measure like vaccination and reducing contacts in order to care for citizens' health (shift work, one person per office, etc.)

When **asked whether or not they believe that the measures taken by governments were effective**, interview participants focused more on expressing how these measures reflected on their mental and physical health and on their social life. So they pointed out that the introduced measures had a negative effect on their psychological health. One of the participants pointed out that he suffered from anxiety due to the uncertainty of the whole situation during the pandemic. All participants believe that despite everything, the state has not done enough to protect the mental health of its citizens. One of the interview participants pointed out that despite the fact that she had a limited social life during the pandemic and that the state itself did not do anything about it, she believes that the state is not responsible for the organization of her social life. Considering the extraordinary situation in the state, it is impossible, according to her, for the state to take care of all aspects of the lives of individuals.

As to whether the **authorities have taken young people's opinions into account when adopting measures aimed at young people** all the participants of the group interview expressed the view that they believe that the opinions of young people were not taken into account, and if they were, they were not familiar with the models of how this was implemented. One participant pointed out that it is precisely in this way, through group interviews (focus groups), that the opinions and attitudes of young people can be questioned in a qualitative way, and she believes that this is how the local government should have approached young people when adopting measures for young people.

When asked the question **did young people lose trust in local government** one participant pointed out that it could be seen that due to populism, they corrected the



determination of the measure, which influenced him to lose confidence in the local government.

Asking participant last question about **what could your local government do to encourage the civic engagement of young people and the cooperation of young people with decision makers** they pointed out that everything should start with informing young people, in such a way that young people should receive enough information so that young people can be actively involved in their local community. Furthermore, they believe that it is necessary to inform young people more and to activate young people as much as possible and show them that they can make changes in their local community. It is not necessary to just wait for the local government to take over this task, but they believe that it all starts with the fact that young people lack civic education. The only way to inform these young people is to go to the places where the young people are and where they gather, namely schools. It is not even a problem of the educational institutions themselves, but it should really start at the national or local level to create even greater and better cooperation between associations and schools. Also, they believe that the link between formal and informal education is missing, and I think that this would inform young people much better. And then they would get more information about where and how they can be activated.

[The complete transcription is here.](#)



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### 3 Conclusion

In conclusion, the COVID-19 crisis has had a major impact on society as a whole at a global level. Its effects were not only felt in the field of health (both physical and mental), but also in social, economic and financial terms, in employment, education, politics, civic engagement, and even in the way we experience leisure. From the view of health issues, youth (18-30) was not affected by the pandemic in a great deal, but went through the same democratic and civic restrictions which had an immense impact on their employment and education, health, wellbeing and lifestyle, which might lead to even worse civic and democratic participation of young people.

With regard to the measures approved by the government and implementation of these measures by local and county authorities both from the interview with decision maker and from the questionnaire or the focus group with young people, it can be deduced that even though measures were taken, they did not reach the majority of young people. It is clear that there is a problem of perception from young people, probably based on a major problem of communication and the reaction of local communities to the crisis and implemented measures. It is failure from the public administrations, which have not been able to connect with nor been able to provide the young population with the necessary information to take advantage of the measures approved to combat the COVID-19 crisis.

It is evident that, from the received feedback from this study, that there is a lack of cooperation between young people and decision-makers, both at the local, county and national levels. Young people are not sufficiently informed about ways to become civically active.

Finally, we can add that local communities also have to start taking measures not only about employability - which is indeed extremely important - but also accompanied by other types of measures related, for example, to training and skills acquisition, to access



to first homes, to cultural and leisure activities, to mental health care, to the possibility of conciliation, and also to the access of young people to consultative and decision-making spaces.

For this reason, in the next phases of this project, we will conduct an investigation on the existing good practices and social innovations implemented in the past to overcome moments of crisis, which may serve as an example to elaborate new ones.



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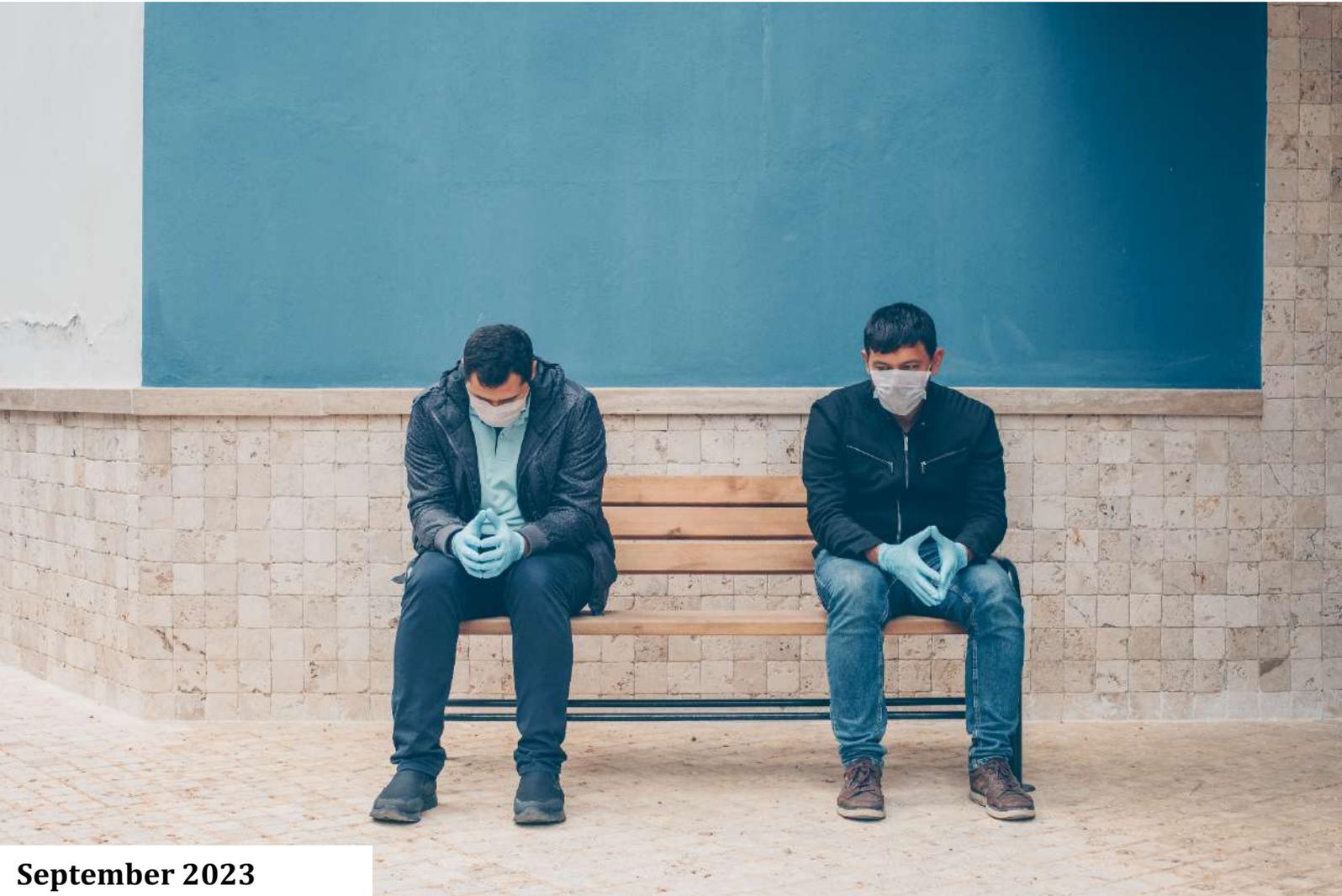
**Project 101091233 - So I BeLiv**

**Research how the local communities reacted  
to the COVID-19 crisis  
National report France**



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**September 2023**  
**Pistes Solidaires**



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## 2 Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis has had an undeniable effect on everyone's life, but while health issues and medical consequences have been discussed in detail, other problems have arisen in particular among young people. From the point of view of health issues, young people (aged 18-30) have not been greatly affected by the pandemic, but they have suffered the same democratic and civic restrictions that have had a considerable impact on their employment and education, health, well-being and lifestyle, which could lead to even lower civic and democratic participation by young people at local/national/European level.

In implementing this research, we would like to see how local communities have responded to the COVID-19 crisis. As part of this research, the partners involved will provide and compare results from Croatia, France, Italy, Slovenia and Spain on how local authorities and national governments in each country have responded to the COVID-19 crisis. The aim is to use the data received to formulate proposals on how to address the socio-economic issues resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic in order to improve future responses.

Following the first part of this project, during which the partners studied the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the consequences of confinement on several aspects of young people's lives. The first part of this research presents how national and local governments have responded to this emergency situation and what action has been taken to combat the negative effects of post-pandemic crises on young people. We will note whether there are differences between national and local policies. Finally, we will analyse what young people aged between 18 and 29 think of the measures adopted and actions taken. To do this, we will present the results of a survey submitted to a sample of 30 young people, enriched by an interview with 4 young people to illustrate the survey.



### 3 How local community reacted to COVID-19 crisis

As part of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, the travel ban in France, also known as "national containment", is a health measure introduced by the French government on three occasions to curb the spread of Covid-19 in France. This measure was combined with a series of policies to restrict human contact and travel, in order to limit the spread of the virus.

- Containment 1 from 17 March to 11 May 2020 not included, i.e. 1 month and 25 days; After a health campaign recommending hygienic "barrier gestures" and physical distancing, the decision of a first national containment was announced on the evening of 16 March 2020 by the President of the Republic, Emmanuel Macron. National containment means restricting travel to what is strictly necessary (food shopping, healthcare and work when telecommuting is not possible), going out close to home (individual sporting activities, dog hygiene), as well as penalising breaches of this new rule, closing the borders of the Schengen area and postponing the second round of municipal elections.
- Containment 2 from 30 October to 15 December 2020, i.e. 1 month and 15 days; essentially with restrictions on travel and gatherings, but less severe than the first containment.
- Containment 3 from April 3 to May 3, 2021, i.e. 28 days, allowing the French to enjoy the outdoors while limiting interaction and introducing a curfew.

In addition, a vaccination campaign will begin on 27 December 2020, with priority given to the elderly and to healthcare and medico-social professionals in the exercise of their profession, then on a voluntary basis with the multiplication of vaccination centres throughout the country.

Since 30 July 2022, the state of health emergency has been lifted, but certain obligations remain (wearing a mask, vaccination, etc.). Since then, the situation has been monitored by a watchdog committee, and the restrictions are gradually being lifted.

As the pandemic evolved, the restrictions changed, but were mainly focused on health and mental protection, and support for the economy (via direct measures for businesses or consumer aid). Support for young people was marked by a flagship measure, "1jeunes1solution" (#1young#1solution), and a number of specific measures for students were put in place.

#### 3.1 Measures taken at national level to support the economy

The solutions put in place revolve around six themes:

- Support to alleviate or bolster cash flow through compensation for short-time working, debt rescheduling and support measures for exporting companies.
- Investment financing (dedicated recovery loans and strengthening working capital for businesses).



- Setting up a mediation system to help companies with credit repayments or disputes within or with the company.
- Enhancing the value of commercial court proceedings for companies in difficulty or to help them emerge from the crisis.
- Support for employment via apprenticeship contracts and professionalisation contracts through several decrees between 2021 and 2023 to encourage the employment of young people in work-linked training. This system of apprenticeship, which combines work experience in a company with training in a training center, helps young people to find work. Under this measure, companies receive direct aid for employing a young person on an apprenticeship/professionalisation contract.
- Specific assistance to deal with rising energy prices

### **3.2 Measures taken at national level to support purchasing power**

In response to inflation, from autumn 2021, the Government has taken massive measures with concrete effects. The government has taken measures to boost purchasing power in response to the rise in inflation as a result of the economic recovery after COVID and the rise in prices following the war in Ukraine. These measures are worth highlighting as they are often cited by young people and students in particular. The measures are set out in the Emergency Measures to Protect Purchasing Power Act and the Supplementary Budget Act for 2022, which make up the 'purchasing power' package:

- Faced with soaring fuel prices, the Government has introduced a "fuel discount", allowing consumers to reduce the cost of fuel at the pump. Over the period in question, this aid amounted to up to 30cts including tax.
- At the end of 2021, a tariff shield on energy prices capped the rise in electricity bills at 4% and froze gas prices at their October 2021 level.
- A number of social benefits have been increased by 4%. These include the basic retirement pension, the RSA, the activity allowance, family allowances and the disabled adults' allowance. Personalised housing benefit (APL) will increase by 3.5%. It should be noted that an exceptional back-to-school bonus of 100 euros has been paid to 10.8 million households in receipt of minimum social benefits or housing benefit, and to students on scholarships.
- Until 31 December 2023, meal vouchers can be used to purchase any food product, whether or not it is directly consumable. These used to be reserved exclusively for food products for employees' meals.
- Assistance for students: grants based on social criteria will be increased by 4% from the start of the 2022 academic year. The 1 euro meal scheme operated by the CROUS for low-income students will be maintained throughout the 2022-2023 academic year.
- Rent increases have been set at a maximum of 3.5% until 30 June 2023.



- Introduction of the value-sharing bonus, which replaces the so-called "Macron bonus" paid to companies in 2019.

Other measures concerning consumers in the private and public sectors, with aid for companies (raising salaries in the civil service, de-capping overtime, buying back RTTs, etc.).

### **3.3 Measures taken at national level to improve mental health care**

Mental health has become less of a taboo subject. By dint of information, reflection in the media and awareness-raising : malaise, anxiety, depression, fear...

In response to the growing need for mental health care, particularly in the wake of the Covid-19 health crisis, the "Mon parcours Psy" system introduced in April 2022 is designed to provide wider and fairer access to mental health care, so that people's mental suffering can be better managed.

The scheme is built around a partnership between community psychologists and those involved in the patient's care pathway. It provides first-line screening and initial care for the entire population from the age of 3.

Every year, nearly 8 million people receive care related to their mental health. But for some people, access to psychological support can be hampered for financial reasons.

Under this scheme, people suffering from mild to moderate mental distress can receive psychological support from a community psychologist. The person must first have been referred by their doctor as part of a care pathway and, depending on their state of health, they can benefit from an assessment interview and 7 follow-up sessions a year, paid for in full or in part by the Assurance Maladie.

The scheme was designed by the Ministry of Health and Prevention and the Assurance Maladie, in consultation with representatives of the professionals involved: psychologists, psychiatrists and doctors, particularly GPs. The subject has been the subject of exchanges and discussions with representatives of psychologists for several years. Discussions on the precise scope of the scheme began in spring 2021. The scheme is based on extensive preliminary work and lessons learned from various schemes introduced since 2018.

It should be noted that a similar scheme, completely free of charge, has been set up for students at universities, CROUS and university health services. (see 1.5)

At the same time, the mental health first aid training program set up in France by PSSMFrance is expanding. The association has adapted the MHFA (Mental Health First Aid) training program to the French context, and holds a licence for the entire country. Created in Australia in 2000 by Betty Kitchener (an educator) and Tony Jorm (a professor of medicine), this program offers generalist training in mental health awareness and assistance to all citizens. Mental health is a major public health issue, as evidenced by the



health crisis and its consequences. The deployment of mental health first aid is on the government's roadmap and is one of the 30 measures set out at the conference on mental health and psychiatry. The association's aim is to train 750,000 mental health first aiders by 2030.

### **3.4 Specific measures to help "#1jeune#1solution" (#1young#1solution)**

Presented by the Prime Minister on 23 July 2020, the "#1jeune1solution" plan devotes 6.7 billion euros to supporting young people, who are particularly hard hit by the economic and social consequences of the health crisis.

The plan proposes a range of tools and measures to provide a tailored response to each situation. Its aim is to enable the 750,000 young people entering the labour market in 2020 to find a way into employment, not forgetting the young people who are already out of work and without training.

The schemes involve

- Dissemination of job offers, work placements and sandwich courses
- Training and guidance, by helping young people discover careers and facilitating access to training organisations
- Commitment by promoting civic service and voluntary work
- Access to housing, with advice, advertisements and information on financial aid.
- Support by promoting the youth commitment contract scheme, developing mentoring and facilitating access to socio-professional support structures.
- A toolbox offering a financial aid simulator and a CV creation tool.

Initial assessments of this scheme have been mixed, and it will take time to implement this major project. A report from the Court of Auditors puts the success advocated by the government into perspective. The trade unions and youth movements are questioning the lack of originality of the measures, which support businesses without really changing the job market for young people, often leaving them in a precarious situation.

Although it was emphasised that resources had been mobilised to a great extent, and that there had been better coordination between the players and between the State and its partners, it is still difficult to measure the effects and, in particular, to attribute the impact to the youth plan. The employment situation of young people has been preserved, if we consider the unemployment rate of 15-24 year olds in the third quarter of 2021 (20%), down by 1.2 points compared to the end of 2019, their activity rate (41.1%, +3.2 points) or the percentage of "Neet" (11.6%, -0.8 points).

The results observed must be assessed in the light of this large-scale project based on the coordination of pre-existing solutions, the mobilisation of players in the economy,



professional integration, training, etc., and the implementation of the common law measures mentioned elsewhere.

### 3.5 Focus on student grants

The travel restrictions have made it harder for students to continue their studies, but they have also made their daily lives more difficult, as they have been hit hard by financial hardship. The government and CROUS (the body responsible for managing university and school facilities) have developed measures specifically for students to combat all forms of student insecurity, guarantee continuity of education and maintain the quality of qualifications.

The #1jeune#1solution platform mentioned above, with offers and advertisements dedicated to students.

- Increasing state-guaranteed student loans to enable young people under 28 to finance their studies, by raising the loan ceiling to €20,000 and increasing the number of target beneficiaries (50,000 students in 2021-2022, i.e. 7 times more than in 2020).
- Combating menstrual insecurity by providing young women with period protection in university halls of residence and university health services.
- 1 euro meals in university canteens. To tackle food insecurity, from January 2021, all students (with and without grants) have been offered two meals a day (lunch and dinner) for the price of one euro per meal in university restaurants. Since January 2021, 5.5 million meals have been served.
- The student and campus life contribution (CVEC) used to finance student support and social assistance initiatives. The CVEC comes from the student registration fees at the beginning of the year, which have been frozen for 2 consecutive years (170 euros for bachelor's degrees, 243 euros for master's degrees and 380 euros for doctorates at the start of the 2021 academic year).
- Increase in grants based on social criteria: for the third consecutive year, grants based on social criteria will be increased by 1% for the start of the 2021 academic year, i.e. double the inflation rate for 2020.
- A freeze on the indexation of rents in university halls of residence: decided in 2000, the freeze on the indexation of rents in university halls of residence has been maintained for the start of the 2021 academic year and extended to the start of the 2022 academic year.
- The creation of 21,600 student tutoring jobs and the doubling of emergency assistance for all students.
- A call for projects for "hybridisation of higher education courses" to enable students to continue their studies: €40 million has been released to fund 34 projects.
- Since 1 February 2021, students have been offered psychological support to break the isolation they feel. Students faced with an unhappy situation can benefit from psychological support without having to pay in advance via the [santépsy.étudiant.fr](https://santépsy.étudiant.fr) platform (launched on 10 March 2021). They can choose their psychologist from the



list of partner professionals available on the interface and make an appointment directly with him or her. The sessions, which can last up to three 45-minute sessions, are completely free of charge. The platform has more than 1,200 psychologists available. More than 250,000 sessions have been carried out and more than 50,000 students have received support.

In response to the pandemic, exceptional measures were promulgated by the national government. Local authorities applied the rules laid down by the government, with no way out. However, given the decentralised organisation of the state, local authorities (regions, départements and towns) were able to put in place additional measures. As a result, solidarity initiatives have been launched to step up the fight against the pandemic and its harmful effects, particularly for young people.

### 3.6 Examples of initiatives at local level

The Pyrénées Atlantiques department supported the government's measures for its public with :

- Free distribution of masks to all secondary school pupils and the elderly.
- Providing schoolchildren with digital equipment to enable them to follow lessons online.
- Free distribution of masks to underprivileged families.

The department of Pyrénées Atlantiques and the city of Pau have offered their professionals who are unable to work to support the service in action. In this way, local solidarity has been put into action to help the most disadvantaged, to distribute masks, to manage vaccination centers... but also to help associations working with vulnerable groups.

The Pyrénées-Atlantiques region is already benefiting fully from the France Relance measures, with over 3,000 young people benefiting from the "youth plan" in 2020. Solidarity.

Following the example of the "santé psy étudiant" and "Mon soutien Psy" schemes, the Pyrénées Atlantiques département, as part of its remit to support solidarity and the most disadvantaged sections of the population, wanted to set up a similar system, aimed at young people, regardless of status and during pandemic peaks and confinement periods. To do this, it relied on a network of youth workers, who were able to refer young people in distress to professionals. The first free session, known as the assessment session, could lead to further consultations, which could then be covered by the common law "mon soutien psy" ("my shrink support"). We were unable to obtain any information on the impact on the public, but the initiative seems worthwhile insofar as it coordinates the various players and makes consultations with psychologists more accessible.

More locally, the city of Pau has continued to implement its "Plan anti-solitude" programme. Launched in 2019, the plan's actions have proved complementary to

government initiatives and can address the very real issues facing young people. The aim of the anti-loneliness plan is to put in place solidarity-based responses in city neighbourhoods to curb isolation and feelings of loneliness. In particular, the plan proposes "small, modest investments" to make public spaces more pleasant and functional. The aim is to give new life or a new function to public spaces in many areas of Pau. This takes the form of renovating small squares or neighbourhood squares where it's pleasant to relax or take part in sporting activities, or enhancing pedestrian walkways or creating shared gardens. These initiatives support encounters and exchanges while enabling residents to take ownership of public space.

We would also like to highlight the "shared table" initiative, which is aimed at French and foreign students, most of whom are housed in Cité U. They are often cut off from their nearest and dearest. For their part, some Palois residents are on their own. The aim of the "table partagée" is to bring people together to share a lunch, once a month, or to take part in activities, in order to recreate "family ties", exchanges and a sharing of cultures. This scheme, which came into particular focus after the initial confinement, is based on solidarity and the commitment of individuals.

In the area of access to food, the New Aquitaine Region is distributing food baskets to young people aged 15 to 30 in difficulty, but without any status requirements. These baskets containing food and hygiene products are available throughout the region via a distribution network supported by local associations. In the Pyrénées Atlantiques, these were Habitat Jeunes (housing for young people) and social centers. This emergency scheme came to an end in June 2022 and the young people are referred to the mainstream system (food bank, solidarity grocery shop, etc.).

The impact of these local measures is not measured and they are often taken as a matter of urgency, in response to the social distress of citizens. However, they deserve to have been formulated.

Whether the measures to respond to the harmful effects of the COVID19 crisis are national or local, they will only rise to the challenge if young people see the effects and feel concerned. This is the subject of the next section, through a questionnaire and a focus group.



## 4 Feedback from target group

### 4.1 Survey results

**30 young people responded to the questionnaire in March 2023, two years after the start of the pandemic.**

- 76.7% are between 18 and 24 years old
- 13.3% are between 25 and 29 years old
- 10% are minors (under 17)
- 56.7% are young women, and 43.3% are young men

46.7% of the young people who responded are students, so we have a preponderance compared to the national situation. For the rest :

- 10% In employment
- 6.7% Civic service
- 3.3% are employed and
- 3.3% unemployed

The majority have a baccalaureate level (66.7%), 10% have a level below baccalaureate, and 23.4% have a higher education diploma (bachelor or master) A large majority of respondents indicated that they were not experiencing any particular difficulties.

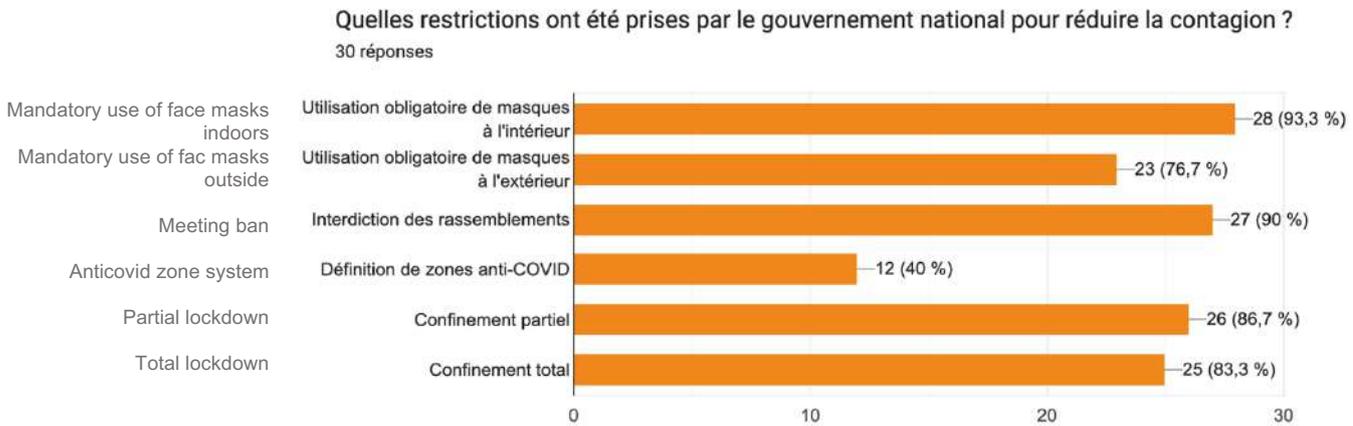
The young people mentioning difficulties cite

- A geographical barrier (remote or rural area), (2)
- A barrier linked to discrimination, (1)
- Economic difficulties, (1)
- Difficulties related to their origin, culture (1)
- Social difficulties (disability, addiction...) (2)



## Effectiveness of measures taken to mitigate the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis

What restrictions has your national government adopted to reduce contagion?



Have the measures taken achieved their objective of preventing contagion?



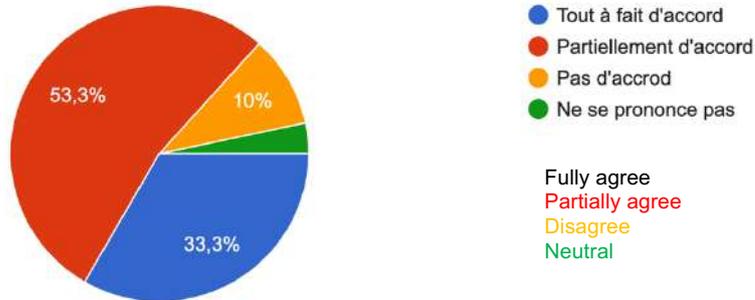
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## Have the measures taken achieved their objective of preventing contagion?

Les mesures prises ont atteint leurs objectifs de prévention des contagions ?

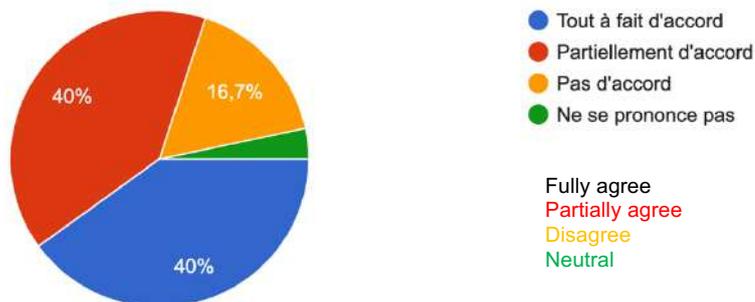
30 réponses



## Did the restrictions negatively affect your life?

Les restrictions ont affecté votre vie quotidienne de manière négative ?

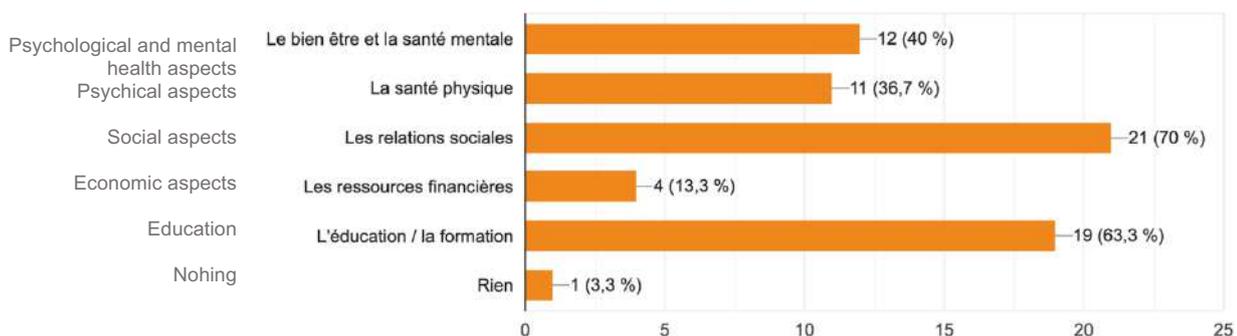
30 réponses



## If so, what aspects of your life have been most affected ?

Si oui, quels sont les aspects de votre vie quotidienne qui ont été le plus impactés ?

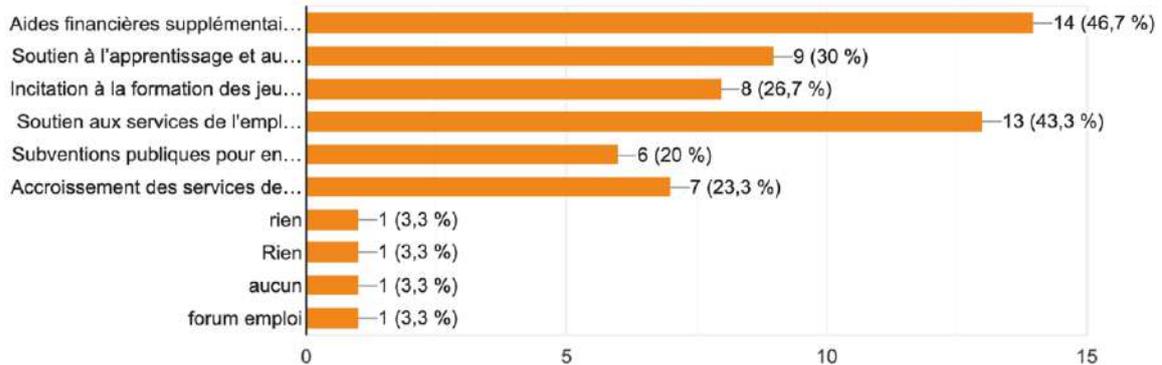
30 réponses



## Following the lifting of restrictions, what kind of measures has your local government taken to address the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis?

Après la levée des restrictions, quelles mesures ont été prises par les collectivités locales (villes, intercommunalités) pour faire face aux conséquences de la crise du COVID-19 ?

30 réponses

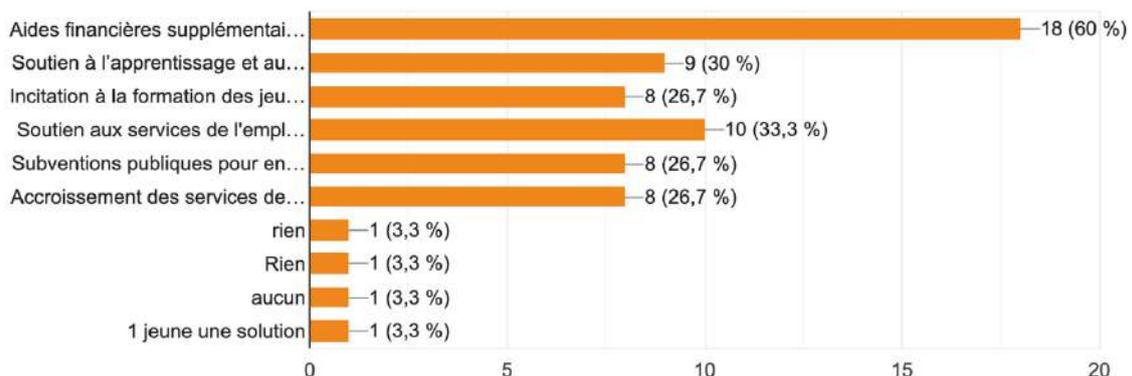


Additional income support for young people  
 Promoting work based learning opportunities, apprenticeships, traineeships and internships  
 Promote educational opportunities for young people and provide them with financier support  
 Strengthening employment services for young people  
 Public subsidies to encourage the recruitment of young people  
 Strenghting mental health services and providing financial support to access it  
 Nithing / Nothing / Nothing  
 Job fair

## Following the lifting of restrictions, what kind of measures has your national government taken to address the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis?

Après la levée des restrictions, quel type de mesures ont été prises par le gouvernement national pour faire face aux conséquences de la crise du COVID-19 ?

30 réponses



Additional income support for young people  
 Promoting work based learning opportunities, apprenticeships, traineeships and internships  
 Promote educational opportunities for young people and provide them with financier support  
 Strengthening employment services for young people  
 Public subsidies to encourage the recruitment of young people  
 Strenghting mental health services and providing financial support to access it  
 Nithing / Nothing / Nothing  
 "1 young, 1 Solution"

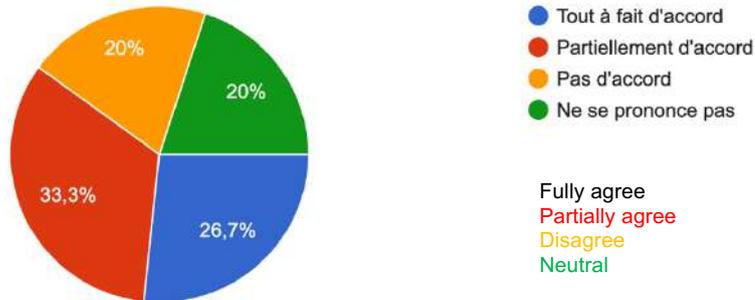


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Have measures taken at the national level had an impact at the local level in your community?

Les mesures prises au niveau national ont eu un impact au niveau local dans votre communauté ?  
30 réponses



What measures have you benefited from?

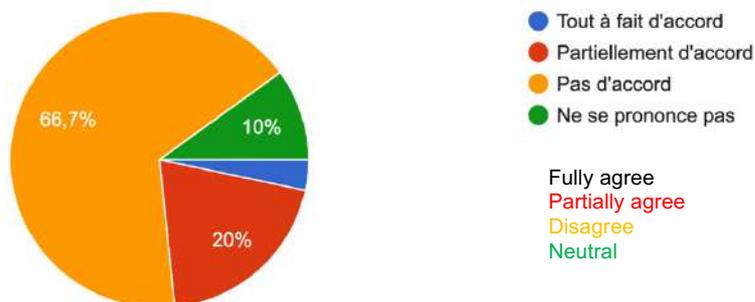
Just 4 young people say they have benefited from specific measures

- Financial assistance
- Gift card for digital equipment
- Additional financial aid specifically for young people
- Youth commitment contract

Young people can mention the assistance offered, however, this aid already existed before covid but few have benefited from it. (e.g. the Contrat Engagement Jeunes, which was in place before).

Did actions taken at the local level incorporate the views of young people?

Les jeunes ont ils été consultés, par le les instances locales (villes, intercommunalités...) pour définir les mesures à prendre ?  
30 réponses



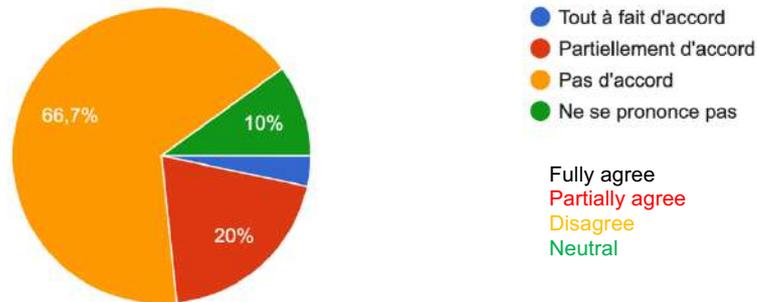
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## Did actions taken at the national level incorporate the views of young people?

Les jeunes ont ils été consultés, par le gouvernement national pour définir les mesures à prendre ?

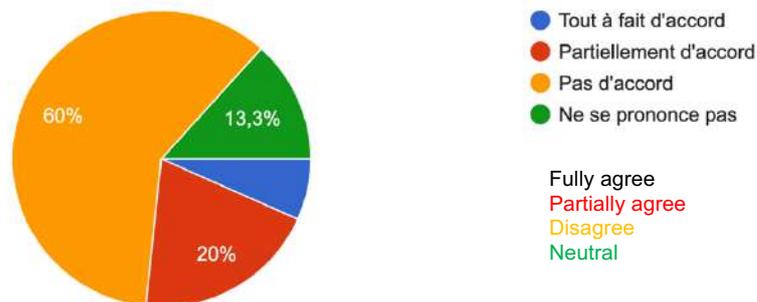
30 réponses



## Have local authorities taken young people's views into account and asked them to contribute to determining what measures should be taken to help them?

Les autorités locales ont pris en compte l'avis des jeunes et leur ont demandé de contribuer à la définition des mesures à prendre pour les aider ?

30 réponses



## What did they do or what could they have done?

- Consultation / Asking young people for their opinions / They could have questioned young people, and helped the most disadvantaged even more / Ask their opinion more / They could have consulted young people or youth representatives. / Listening to people / They could have asked us for our opinion on the measures they were going to put in place to assess how we felt about them and to think about the impact they were going to have on young people's lives. / Consulting young people on education. / Polling young people / Survey via social networks / Better monitoring and communication between all the departments involved to identify and repair drop-outs.
- From an educational point of view, it was really a disaster for distance learning, which played a big part in the dropout rate because there wasn't enough interaction between students and teachers who didn't know the technology.
- Work guaranteed



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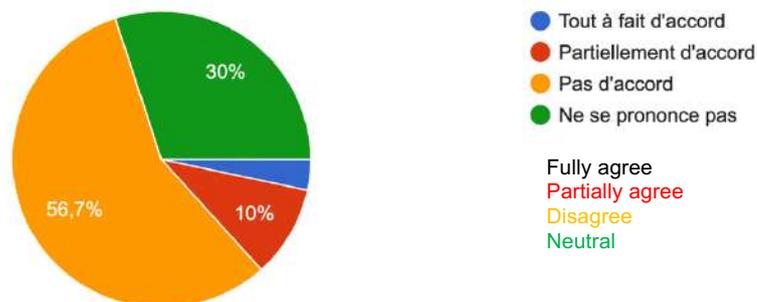
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- Barrier measures / Closed the borders to prevent the virus from entering the country
- Greater attention to the mental health and well-being of young people / Assessing the consequences of confinement during confinement / Better consideration of the difficulties and recommendations of the people concerned / promotion of solidarity initiatives (food collections, encouraging citizens to help each other...)

Have local authorities taken young people's views into account and asked them to contribute to determining what measures should be taken to help them?

Les autorités nationales ont pris en compte l'avis des jeunes et leur ont demandé de contribuer à la définition des mesures à prendre pour les aider ?

30 réponses



What did they do or what could they have done?

- Consultation / Ask young people what they think / Listen to us / A participatory vote / Listen to young people / Ask their opinion more / They could have consulted young people or youth representatives. / However, for the same reason, they could have asked for the opinions of young people in the region to find out what impact these measures would have on young people's lives. / Consulting young people on education. / Polling young people / A citizens' committee
- Closing the borders earlier would have helped... Instead of always thinking about the consumer society. / Closed borders
- Better consideration of citizens' difficulties and recommendations / Be concerned about people's morale / Greater transparency + honesty / Financial aid for workers in difficulty/ Support for the cultural sector/students/ Valorisation of workers affected / Call center and /or interventions for people exposed to heightened risks (isolation, domestic/domestic violence, suicidal thoughts, extreme precariousness...)...

What other measures do you think should have been put in place by local authorities (towns, inter-municipalities) to deal with the COVID-19 crisis?

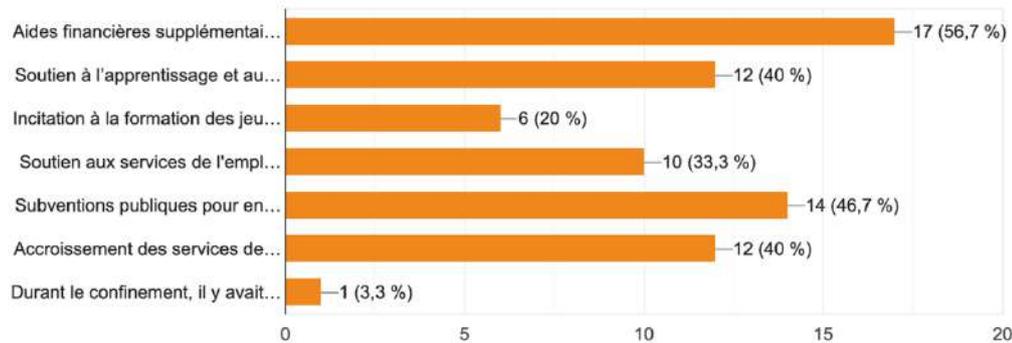


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Quelles autres mesures, selon vous, auraient dû être mises en place par les collectivités locales (villes, intercommunalités) pour faire face à la crise du COVID-19 ?

30 réponses

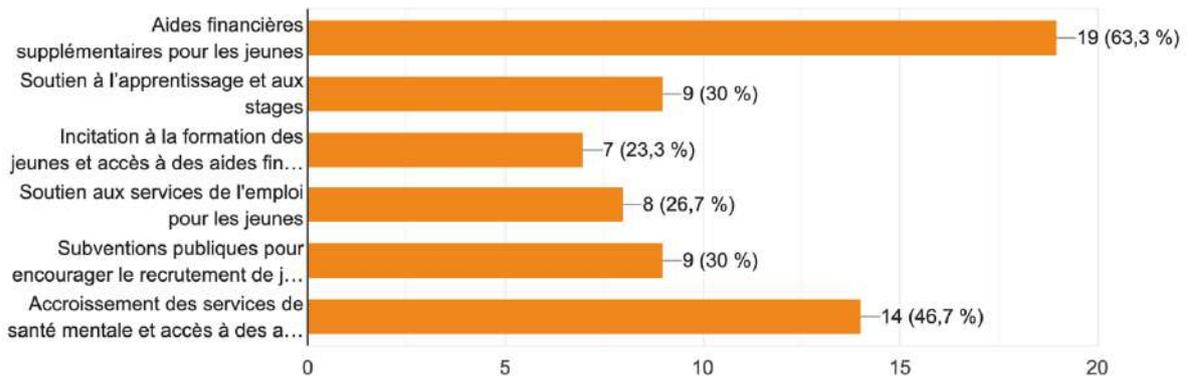


Additional income support for young people  
 Promoting work based learning opportunities, apprenticeships, traineeships and internships  
 Promote educational opportunities for young people and provide them with financial support  
 Strengthening employment services for young people  
 Public subsidies to encourage the recruitment of young people  
 Strengthening mental health services and providing financial support to access it

What other measures do you think should have been put in place by the national government to deal with the COVID-19 crisis?

Quelles autres mesures, selon vous, auraient dû être mises en place par le gouvernement national pour faire face à la crise du COVID-19 ?

30 réponses



Additional income support for young people  
 Promoting work based learning opportunities, apprenticeships, traineeships and internships  
 Promote educational opportunities for young people and provide them with financial support  
 Strengthening employment services for young people  
 Public subsidies to encourage the recruitment of young people  
 Strengthening mental health services and providing financial support to access it



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## 4.2 Analysing responses and focus groups-

According to the survey, young people feel that the health measures taken to limit the contagion have been effective, but 80% say that this has had negative effects on their lives. The first impact was on their social relations (70% cited this item), followed by access to training and education (63.3%), and finally mental health, cited by 40% of the young people questioned.

When the restrictions were lifted, government measures were deployed on a massive scale, with young people citing financial aid for young people (60% at national level and 43.3% at local level) and employment support measures (43.3% at local level and 33.3% at national level). It should be noted that none of them cited plan #1jeune#1solution, which centralises all these measures. Nearly half feel that these measures have had an impact on their career or their environment, but only four say that they have benefited from these measures.

The young people said that they had not been consulted at either national or local level, even though this was a measure they felt was important, as it was one of their most regularly cited proposals. Young people also feel that the government should have taken more action on mental health (46.7% cite this), and often mention this issue in the responses to be given to young people.

These different responses illustrate the fact that young people are not very well informed about the measures that concern them and that have been put in place for them.

Young people experience situations differently, whether they are in employment or training or in a stable employment situation. For jobseekers, the first year was a complex one, particularly because it was very difficult to find a job and it was hard to project oneself. This led to a lot of questions about adult life and the future, like a feeling of panic about the future. The students also questioned their future and the success of their studies. They were often singled out during the pandemic for their demands and attitudes. Despite this, the young people are aware of the seriousness of the situation, but despite the restrictions, they wanted to live their youth and make themselves useful to others. Exchanges with young people show that they want to help and get involved, but the way to do so is not always official. Examples include donating blood and supporting associations, but also listening to a friend, organising a little evening to unwind, etc. For everyone, this period required adaptability, and for young people it may also have required a little ingenuity and creativity to continue to live their youth.



## 5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on young people goes well beyond the health field, putting them in difficulty in the areas of employment, education, well-being and quality of life in general. While the health risks posed by the pandemic have not had the same impact on young people, the effects of democratic and civic restrictions have been keenly felt.

The measures taken by national governments and local communities have revealed gaps and limitations in addressing the problems faced by young people during this crisis. It seems that the health emergency has taken precedence over the social and civic aspects. Young people's first need is to feel useful and to see opportunities in the future. It has to be said that they were not presented with any prospects during the pandemic.

The crisis has revealed latent problems in education, access to employment, social inequalities, the digital divide... And one of the fundamental problems is access to information and rights. Many young people have not benefited from the schemes in place due to a lack of knowledge. This reveals one more thing, namely that young people are diverse and that a "sectoral" youth policy based on "status" is showing its limitations. Emphasis has been placed on the situation of students, often leaving young people with fewer opportunities or young workers on the sidelines. The "1 young person, 1 solution" scheme takes time to become firmly rooted in young people's lives, and does not offer any innovative solutions in a global approach to young people's situations.

However, the issues raised by the crisis, in particular the question of access to employment and dealing with young people's mental health, have enabled these problems to be taken seriously. These lessons in terms of innovation, digital technology, training and information need to be reinforced and continued. Young citizens expect more cooperation and consultation. It seems that a comprehensive and ambitious youth policy is essential if we are to meet the challenges of tomorrow and enable young people to play an active and lasting part in society.



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**Project 101091233 - So I BeLiv**

**Research how the local communities reacted  
to the COVID-19 crisis  
National report Spain**



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# 1 Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis has had a major impact on society as a whole at a global level, and can be considered a turning point in human history. Its effects were not only felt in the field of health (both physical and mental), but also in social, economic and financial terms, in employment, education, politics, civic engagement, and even in the way we experience leisure.

It is objectively true that most of the news, research and responses focused on the health effects of the pandemic, especially on physical health and to a lesser extent on mental health, and as the young population between 18 and 30 years of age is the least affected by the effects of COVID-19 on their physical health, it can be said that they were somewhat neglected. The reality is that the crisis has shaped them like no other age group, precisely because they are at a stage in their lives when they are developing as individuals and facing working life for the first time, their incomes have contracted dramatically, as has their socialisation process in educational institutions.

The effects which this may have on their civic and democratic participation at local, national and European level remain to be seen, but we can say that they have certainly been affected.

Through this research we seek to know how local communities reacted to the COVID-19 as the administration closest to the citizens and the one which neighbours usually raise their demands to. Therefore, the partner organisations of the *So I BeLiv* project, from Spain, Croatia, France, Italy and Slovenia, will provide and compare the results in each of these countries to find out how local authorities and also national governments acted during the pandemic.

The main objective of this research and of the *So I BeLiv* project is to use the data received to formulate proposals on how to address the socio-economic problems resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and other possible future global or national crises.



## 2 How local community reacted to COVID-19 crisis

During the COVID-19 epidemic, Spain was one of the first and most severely affected countries.

The Spanish Government declared a **state of alarm** on 14 March 2020<sup>1</sup>, which was extended until 21 June 2020. On 28 April 2020, a **De-escalation Plan** was approved, which gradually rendered ineffective various measures approved during the state of alarm. During the so-called "**new normality**" phase, prevention, containment and coordination measures were adopted to bring the situation resulting from Covid under control. This was the case until 25 October 2020, when the state of alert was re-declared for a new variant of the virus and extended until 9 May 2021.

With the initial declaration of the state of alarm, the population was also in lockdown in order to limit contagion, which even meant that children and young people stopped going to school and that non-essential workers did not go to work. With the above-mentioned De-escalation Plan, approved at the end of April 2020, some of the casuistry related to lockdown was relaxed.

This Plan sought to gradually return to normality, in order to maintain the safety and health protection of citizens. The de-escalation had 5 phases:

- Phase 0 - Preparation for de-escalation. It began with allowing citizens to go out of their houses, individual and non-contact sports activities, walks, attending family gardens, and economic activities with limited capacity and by appointment.
- Phase I - Initial. The partial opening of different activities, such as agriculture, small businesses, hotels and tourist accommodation was allowed, with exceptions.
- Phase II - Intermediate. Activities that remained closed in Phase I were partially opened. Catering business began to open with limited occupancy, respecting separation measures and table service only, as well as the reopening of auditoriums, monuments, cinemas, etc. with a third of their seating capacity, or half in the case of outdoor seating. The school year did not resume in person until September 2020, but with exceptions.
- Phase III - Advanced. General mobility was resumed with the masks being mandatory to use in public transport and the recommendation to use them outside. Rules were relaxed in restaurants and shops.

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<sup>1</sup> *Crisis sanitaria COVID-19 - Atención e información - Punto de Acceso General.* (n.d.).  
[https://administracion.gob.es/pag\\_Home/atencionCiudadana/Crisis-sanitaria-COVID-19.html](https://administracion.gob.es/pag_Home/atencionCiudadana/Crisis-sanitaria-COVID-19.html)



- New normality. Social and economic restrictions ended, but epidemiological surveillance, the reinforced capacity of the health system, and the self-protection of citizens were maintained.

Finally, on 5 July 2023, following an agreement signed in the Council of Ministers, the end of the health crisis caused by COVID-19 was agreed.

## 2.1 National measures taken to cope with the crisis generated by COVID-19

Faced with the seriousness of the social and health crisis resulting from COVID-19, the Spanish government responded with a Social Shield, mobilising public resources to strengthen health and social services and to protect workers, companies, and the most vulnerable people. The Social Shield contained measures on labour, equality, housing, credit, tax relief, and economic activity. The measures adopted can be grouped into 3 categories: measures for citizens, measures for the self-employed, and measures for companies. Throughout this research we will focus on the first of these, although we will expand on measures from the other two blocks that have had a greater impact on the lives of young people.

### **Temporary layoff scheme (ERTE)<sup>2</sup>**

ERTEs allow an employment contract to be suspended for economic, technical, organisational or production reasons, or due to temporary force majeure, which is why the Government made use of this figure with the approval of Royal Decree-Law 8/2020 of 17 March on extraordinary urgent measures to address the economic and social impact of COVID-19. On the one hand, it reinforced the contributory unemployment benefit to cover people who did not meet the minimum contribution period required under ordinary circumstances, and on the other, it no longer counted the time of contract suspension or reduction of working hours resulting from an ERTE as part of the maximum period for receiving unemployment benefit.

This measure protected young people from dismissal in this temporary framework, as they were the group most at risk of losing their jobs, due to their greater temporary nature and their greater presence in sectors such as catering and tourism.

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<sup>2</sup> *Juventud en riesgo: análisis de las consecuencias socioeconómicas de la COVID-19 sobre la población joven en España. Informe de urgencia/1.* (2020). Injuve. <https://www.injuve.es/observatorio/formacion-empleo-y-vivienda/estudio-consecuencias-economicas-covid-19-en-la-juventud>

### **Labour reform<sup>3</sup>**

Royal Decree-Law 32/2021 of 28 December on urgent measures for labour reform, guaranteeing employment stability and transforming the labour market was approved in February 2022, with effect from 1 January.

One of its measures has been the abolition of the temporary contract for works and services, which means that companies can now only hire temporarily to cover circumstances of production and for the replacement of workers. Among the effects there was an increase in open-ended contracts, since temporary employment has been one of the characteristics of the labour market for young people in Spain. The contract statistics have confirmed the increase in open-ended contracts and the reduction in temporary ones. As a result, the ratio of temporary contracts decreased, especially among the youngest workers. In fact, according to the data, 79 % of young people today have an open-ended contract; that figure was 47 % before the labour reform.

### **Suspension of evictions and moratorium on rentals and on mortgages<sup>4</sup>**

In Spain, access to housing has been a problem since the 2008 crisis, and the COVID-19 crisis deepened the problem. For this reason, it was decided to suspend evictions for months, the automatic renewal of rental contracts was implemented (which is the main housing option among young people), and a system of protection for tenants in vulnerable situations who cannot afford to pay their rent was set up, including moratoriums on payment and direct rental subsidies.

In addition, a young people's rental voucher has been approved, consisting of both direct aid and an increase in social housing at affordable prices.

### **Guaranteed supply of water, electricity and natural gas to vulnerable consumers, social electricity voucher<sup>5</sup>**

It was prohibited to suspend the supply of electricity, petroleum products, natural gas and water to consumers in their usual place of residence.

In addition, the social electricity voucher was approved, a discount on electricity bills to protect the most vulnerable consumers, ranging from 25 % to 70 %.

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<sup>3</sup> El BOE publica las medidas urgentes para la reforma laboral, la garantía de la estabilidad en el empleo y la transformación del mercado de trabajo. (n.d.) | SEPE. <https://www.sepe.es/HomeSepe/fr/que-es-el-sepe/comunicacion-institucional/noticias/historico-de-noticias/2021/detalle-noticia.html?folder=/2021/Diciembre/&detail=El-BOE-publica-las-medidas-urgentes-para-la-reforma-laboral-la-garant-a-de-la-estabilidad-en-el-empleo-y-la-transformaci-n-del-mercado-de-trabajo>

<sup>4</sup> Medidas para la ciudadanía. (n.d.). [https://portal.mineco.gob.es/es-es/ministerio/covid19/Paginas/Medidas para ciudadanos.aspx](https://portal.mineco.gob.es/es-es/ministerio/covid19/Paginas/Medidas_para_ciudadanos.aspx)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

### **Minimum living income<sup>6</sup>**

This measure ensures that all citizens have a minimum income that allows them to live with dignity. It is not a one-off benefit, but is indefinite as long as the requirements are met. It can be applied for from the age of 23, or from the age of 18 if there are dependent minors.

### **Increase in the minimum wage<sup>7</sup>**

The minimum wage was 950 euros as of March 2020, and is now 1,080 euros per month. According to Comisiones Obreras (CC.OO.), one of the largest trade unions in Spain, this increase especially helps the young population, since according to the data<sup>8</sup> of those benefiting from the new minimum wage, 31.7 % would be between 16 and 24 years old and full-time employees and 19.2 % between 25 and 34 years old, also full-time employees.

### **Young cultural voucher<sup>9</sup>**

This is a direct grant of 400 euros for 18-year-olds that was launched in 2022. It has several functions: it encourages young people to discover culture, promotes its consumption, and helps the country's cultural sector, which has suffered greatly during the pandemic.

### **Modification of university loan contracts and increase in grants<sup>10</sup>**

This measure helped students who applied for a loan for Master's and PhD studies by suspending payments during 2020 and extending the deadlines thereafter.

In addition, the budget allocation for grants for further education was increased.

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<sup>6</sup> INGRESO MÍNIMO VITAL - Medidas sociales frente al coronavirus (COVID-19) - Ministerio de Derechos Sociales y Agenda 2030. (s. f.). <https://www.sanidad.gob.es/ssi/covid19/ingresoMinVital/home.htm>

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<sup>8</sup> García, Y. (2023, febrero 15). Efectos de la subida del SMI a 1.080 euros: impacto "limitado" en el empleo y reducción de la desigualdad y la pobreza. Newtral. <https://www.newtral.es/efectos-subida-smi/20230215/>

<sup>9</sup> Bono Cultural Joven. (s/f). <https://www.culturaydeporte.gob.es/destacados/bono-cultural-joven.html>

<sup>10</sup> Ayudas para estudiantes, investigadores y profesores - Medidas sociales frente al coronavirus (COVID-19) - Ministerio de Derechos Sociales y Agenda 2030. (s/f). <https://www.sanidad.gob.es/ssi/covid19/universidades/ayudas.htm>



## **Facilities in educational establishments<sup>11</sup>**

During the 2019-2020 academic year, the autonomous communities implemented measures to reduce the digital divide among students. Once the needs had been detected, a series of solutions were offered, such as dismantling ICT classrooms and handing out desktop computers to students who needed them due to not having the technical means or economic resources; educational reinforcement plans for pupils with learning difficulties; facilitating communication with families about the measures adopted and the monitoring of students' learning; adapting teaching programmes; measures relating to the organisation of spaces and timetables; the most vulnerable school population continued to be offered the same services they received in schools, but in their homes; all available audiovisual resources were made available to the educational community free of charge and in open access; and facilitating the university entrance exams by postponing the exams and simplifying their difficulty.

## **Mental health measures<sup>12</sup>**

Due to the fact that the mental health of the population was diminished as a result of the pandemic, the Spanish government has updated the Mental Health Strategy until 2026.

The development of the Strategy is materialised in the approval of the Mental Health Action Plan 2022-24, financed with 100 million euros. It includes actions aimed at the young and adolescent population.

One of the first actions of this Plan has been the launch of the suicide hotline, the 024-telephone number. Moreover, a chat service has been added, with young people in particular in mind.

## **2.2 Initiatives at local level**

Spain is a decentralised country where the State has a series of competences, the Autonomous Communities have others, and the municipalities have others that are different and more limited, especially in the area that concerns us in this research, so its scope of action has sometimes been limited as far as initiatives against COVID-19 are concerned.

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<sup>11</sup> *Educación, pandemia y brechas digitales: lecciones de un momento insólito.* (S/f). Gob.es.  
<https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/dam/jcr:74ddea51-924a-4d9c-b96b-cac342bd2578/pe-n11-art04-universidad-complutense.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> *El Gobierno presenta el Plan de Acción 2021-2024 Salud Mental y COVID-19 para atender al impacto provocado por la pandemia.* (s/f). Gob.es.  
<https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/presidente/actividades/paginas/2021/091021salud-mental.aspx>



During de-escalation, four alert levels were established. These levels, from 1 to 4, were determined on the basis of several factors, mainly the number of COVID-19 cases and the hospital occupancy of the health districts. The classification was as follows<sup>13</sup>:

- No alert (white).
- Level 1 (green).
- Level 2 (yellow).
- Level 3 (orange).
- Level 4 (red).
- Level 4. Grade I (dark red).
- Level 4. Grade II (black).

As the level of alert increased, so did the restrictions in the health districts in question. Following the state of alert, the autonomous communities were responsible for restrictions in their territory, giving rise to autonomous perimeter lockdowns and also to perimeter closures in municipalities with a high number of cases.

As part of the research, and with the aim of finding out first-hand how the pandemic was managed at the local level, an interview was conducted with Pablo Gálvez Alba, the deputy mayor of Archidona during the last legislature (2019-2023). Archidona is a municipality in the interior of the province of Malaga, in the autonomous community of Andalusia, with a population of just over 8,000 inhabitants.

There was a perimeter closure in the municipality from 29 October to 9 November 2020, as there was a lockdown in the entire region to which it belongs. Subsequently, there was another perimeter closure in Archidona due to having exceeded the incidence set at that time, which was extended from 21 January to 5 February 2021.

Among the restrictions approved by the municipality, given its limited scope of action, were the mandatory use of masks indoors (and also outdoors during the first months of the pandemic), the closure of parks and the suspension of parties and any type of activity involving crowds of people. Other measures taken at the local level to try to alleviate the effects of the virus have included street sweeping and increased cleaning, providing material to local women to make masks at the beginning of the pandemic when there were supply problems, equipping schools with air purifiers for the safety of pupils, and creating a food bank to help residents with financial problems.

The town council considers that the measures adopted by the national government were appropriate, and that they contributed effectively to limiting contagion among the residents.

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<sup>13</sup> *Medidas preventivas COVID 19 - Junta de Andalucía.* (s/f). Mapacovid.es. <https://www.mapacovid.es/>

However, it is also considered that these measures had negative effects on some aspects of young people's lives, especially in the social and educational spheres, as they deprived them of contact with their peers at an essential stage of their lives, which could also have had repercussions on their academic performance.

As for the acceptance by the local population of the measures taken to limit contagion, it is confirmed that they were largely accepted, and that there was active cooperation from the vast majority of the municipality in heeding the recommendations. However, according to the deputy mayor, young people have lost confidence in the local authorities, perhaps because they are the first level of administration and the closest to them.

When asked what measures the municipality took to mitigate the negative effects of the lockdown on young people, the answer was that additional income support for youngsters was approved, and that public subsidies were called to encourage the recruitment of young people. In any case, the interviewee thinks that these measures did not achieve their objective, and that communication with young people should have been strengthened in order to help them more effectively. On the other hand, he also denounces a certain indifference from part of the population to the events promoted to help young people overcome the COVID-19 crisis. On a positive note, he added that an association was set up, which did collaborate with the City Council to try to improve the difficult situation caused by the pandemic.

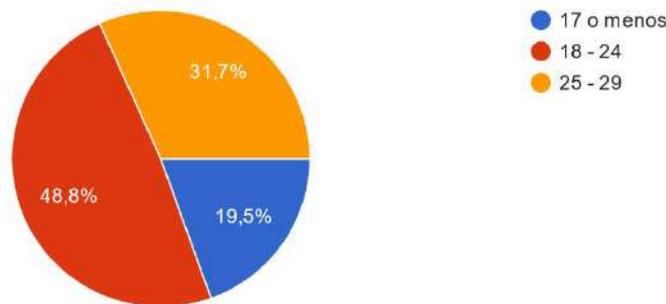


### 3 Feedback from target group

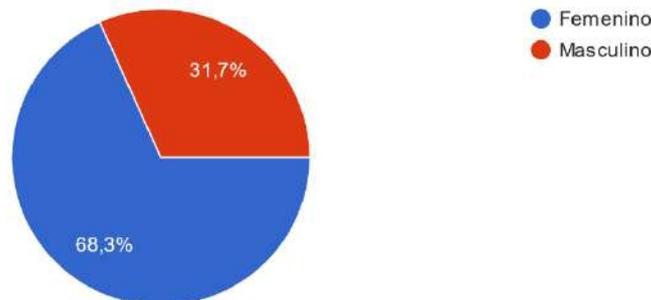
For the *So I BeLiv* WP1 research, called “Research on the impact that the COVID-19 crisis had on young people”, a questionnaire was created for this target group to find out their opinions and experiences on this topic.

The questionnaire was answered by 41 young people, of whom almost half (48.8 %) were between 18 and 24 years old. Of the total number of young people, 68.3 % were women.

Edad  
41 respuestas



Género  
41 respuestas



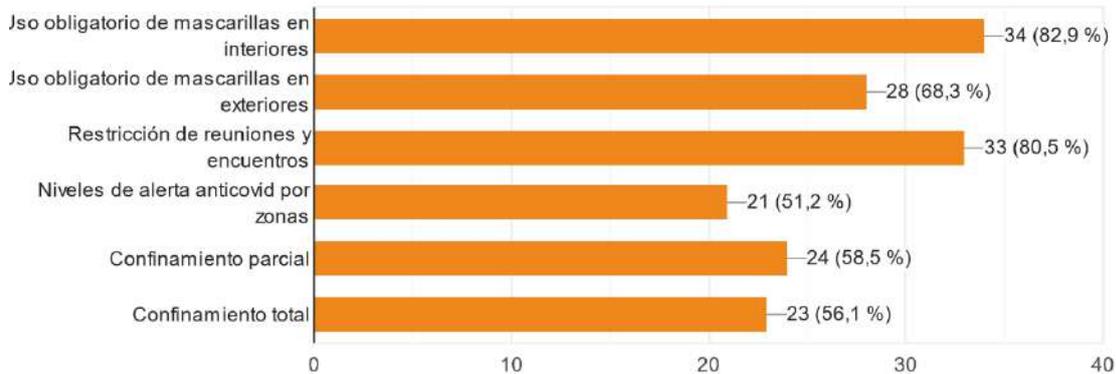
Section 4 of the questionnaire was entitled "Effectiveness of measures taken to mitigate the COVID-19 crisis", and the following is a summary of the responses of the young respondents.

Most agreed that both the national and local governments selected the use of face masks indoors before all other measures. It was striking that the dominant response was not

lockdown, but this may be due to the fact that this measure was in place for a shorter period of time, whereas the use of the mask was ongoing until very recently.

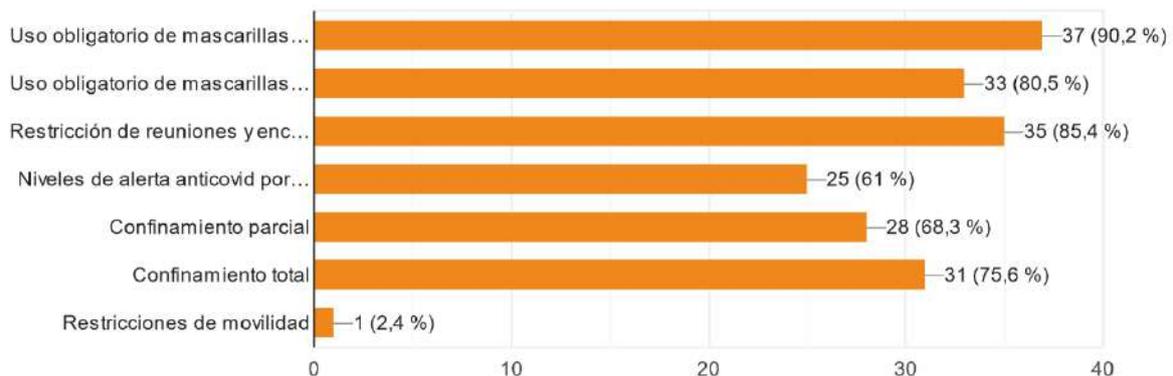
#### ¿Qué restricciones ha adoptado tu gobierno local para reducir el contagio?

41 respuestas



#### ¿Qué restricciones ha adoptado tu gobierno nacional para reducir el contagio?

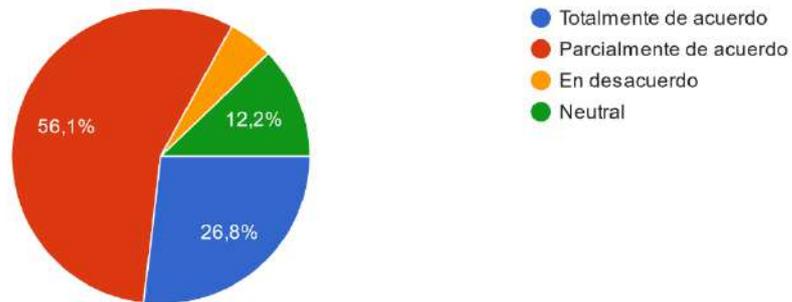
41 respuestas



A large majority strongly agreed (26.8 %) or partially agreed (56.1 %) that the measures taken were successful in preventing infections. Most young people also said that the measures have had a negative impact on their lives: 34.1 % strongly agreed and 29.3 % partially agreed. 3/4 stated that they had been most affected by the measures in terms of psychological and mental health issues.

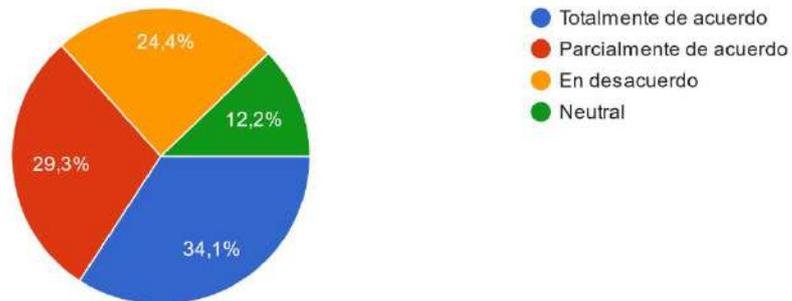
### ¿Las medidas adoptadas han logrado su objetivo de prevenir los contagios?

41 respuestas



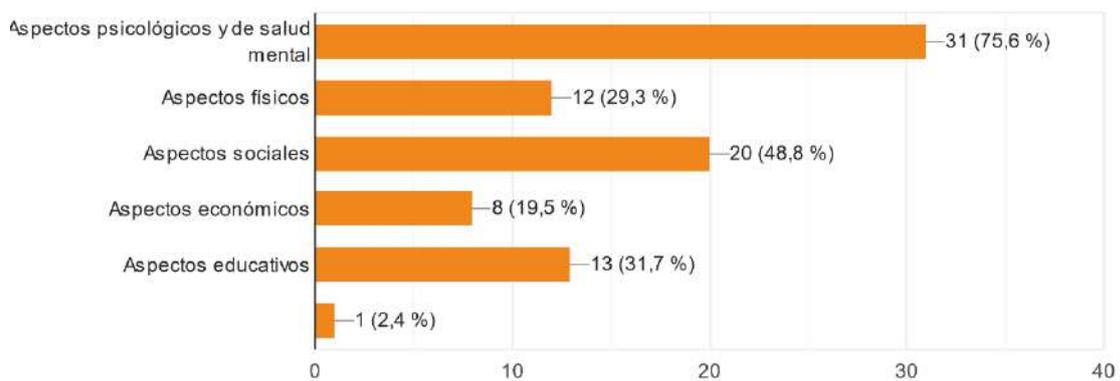
### ¿Las restricciones afectaron negativamente a tu vida?

41 respuestas



### En caso afirmativo, ¿qué aspectos de tu vida se han visto más afectados?

41 respuestas



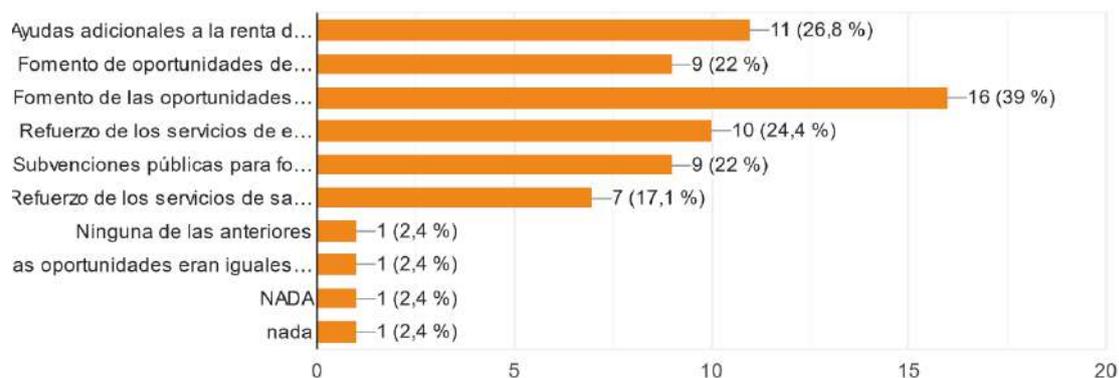
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Regarding measures to address the negative effects of COVID-19 after the lifting of restrictions, the same percentage of young people (39 %) responded that the measures adopted by the local government were the promotion of educational opportunities and financial support for this purpose, and those adopted by the national government were subsidies to encourage the employment of young people. However, in the opinion of young people, the measure most adopted by the national government was additional income support for young people, with 41.5 %.

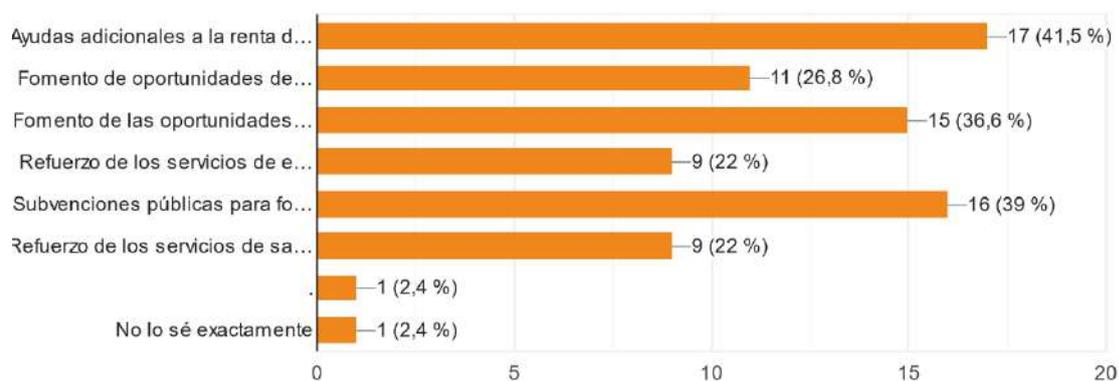
Tras el levantamiento de las restricciones, ¿qué tipo de medidas ha adoptado tu gobierno local para hacer frente a los efectos negativos de la crisis de COVID-19?

41 respuestas



Tras el levantamiento de las restricciones, ¿qué tipo de medidas ha adoptado tu gobierno nacional para hacer frente a los efectos negativos de la crisis de COVID-19?

41 respuestas

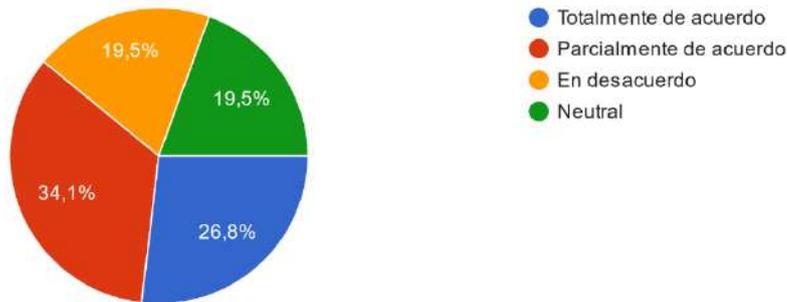


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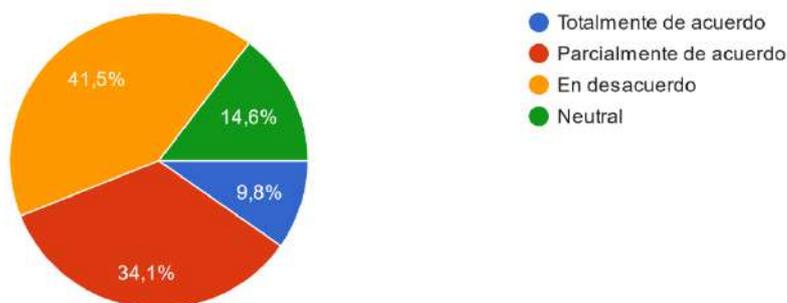
That said, most fully (26.8 %) or partially agreed (34.1 %) that the measures taken at the national level had an impact at the local level.

¿Las medidas adoptadas a nivel nacional han tenido repercusiones a nivel local en tu comunidad?  
41 respuestas

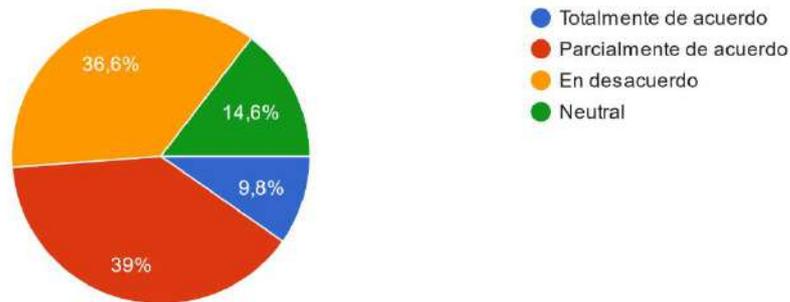


Despite the above, almost half of the respondents (41.5 %) considered that young people's opinions were not considered in local measures. Paradoxically, this percentage drops to 36.6 % at national level, while 39 % partially agreed that their views were taken into account.

¿Las medidas adoptadas a nivel local incorporaron las opiniones de las personas jóvenes?  
41 respuestas

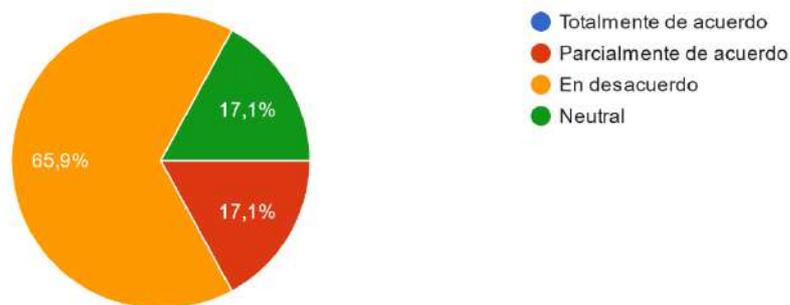


¿Las medidas adoptadas a nivel nacional incorporaron las opiniones de las personas jóvenes?  
41 respuestas



In line with the above, 65.9 % thought that local authorities had not taken their opinion into account and had not asked for their contribution, with the percentage dropping to 46.3 % in the case of local authorities.

¿Las autoridades locales han tenido en cuenta la opinión de las personas jóvenes y les han pedido que contribuyan a determinar las medidas que deben tomarse para ayudarles?  
41 respuestas

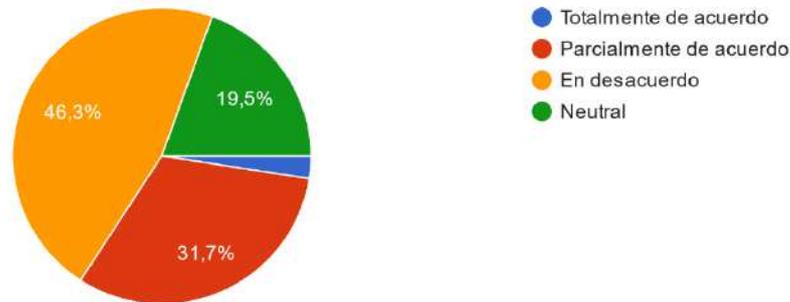


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¿Las autoridades nacionales han tenido en cuenta la opinión de las personas jóvenes y les han pedido que contribuyan a determinar las medidas que deben adoptarse para ayudarles?

41 respuestas

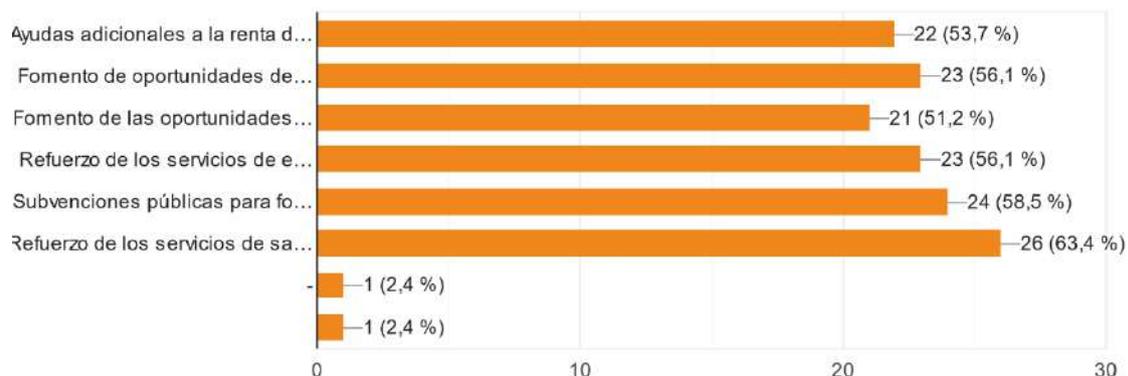


At both levels of administration, the young people surveyed considered that the measures outlined a few questions ago should have been increased, and that public opinion needed to be listened to and communication needed to be more direct. There was a demand for more attention to mental health at both local and national level.

Finally, most respondents felt that both local and national government should have implemented the measures cited in the questionnaire more widely to address the COVID-19 crisis.

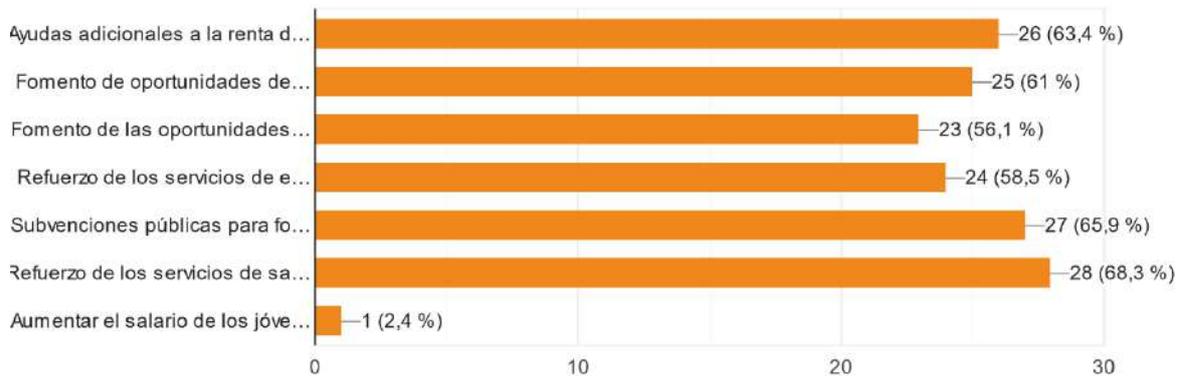
¿Qué otras medidas crees que debería haber aplicado el gobierno local para atajar la crisis de COVID-19?

41 respuestas



¿Qué otras medidas crees que debería haber aplicado el gobierno nacional para atajar la crisis de COVID-19?

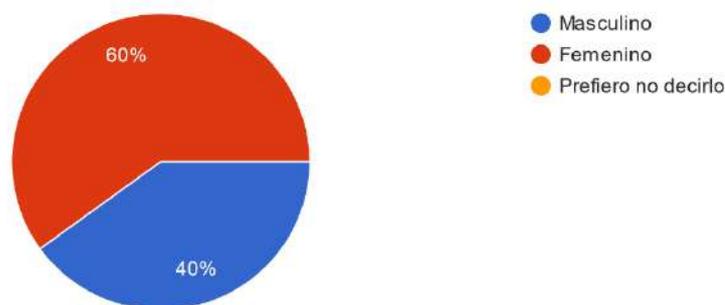
41 respuestas



For WP2 we went a step further and organised a focus group with 5 young people aged between 16 and 24, 3 of them female and 2 of them male.

Género

5 respuestas



One is currently studying and working, one is unemployed and not looking for a job, one is unemployed and looking for a job, and 2 are currently studying. As for the last level of studies completed, one has no studies, 2 have the School Graduate / Intermediate Level, and 2 have the Bacallaureate / Higher Level.



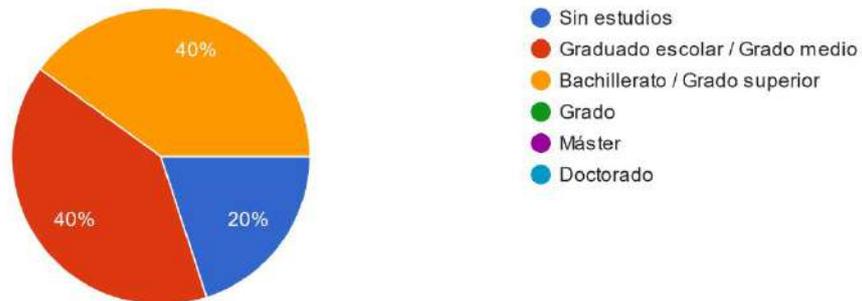
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Situación actual  
5 respuestas



Último nivel de estudios completado  
5 respuestas

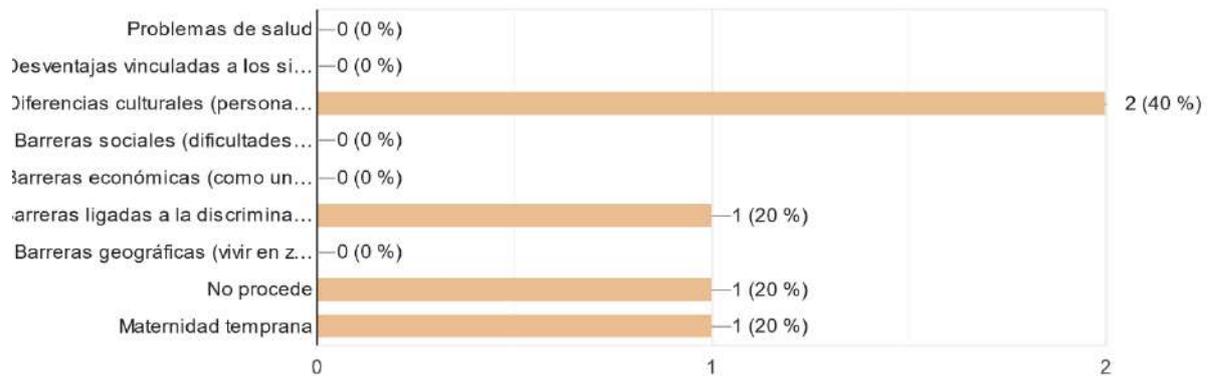


As for the obstacles/barriers they face, one declares that it is not applicable, two are of migrant origin, one refers to barriers linked to discrimination and one has been a mother at a very young age.



### ¿Te enfrentas a alguno de los siguientes obstáculos/barreras?

5 respuestas



When asked how their community was affected by the lockdown, all without exception answered negatively, although the reasons they gave varied. However, the most repeated reason was the impact on employment, citing in particular the closure of cultural centres, local venues and local businesses, which in some cases affected them personally or their families.

On the other hand, one of the participants in the focus group mentions a very interesting issue, which is sometimes invisible, and that is the fact that women who suffered gender-based violence were more exposed to such violence because they spent more time at home with their aggressors. This has meant a worsening of their conditions, their physical and mental health. Incidentally, the negative impact on mental health is another of the repercussions that, in the opinion of the participants, the lockdown in their community had.

Furthermore, when asked about the type of measures taken by the government (local or national) after the lifting of restrictions to deal with the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis, young people highlighted the continued use of face masks in hospitals, health centres or public transport. In addition, they cite increased disinfection and cleaning in public places, as well as maintaining a safe distance.

In their opinion, although they believe that public administrations supported young people, they stated that nothing was done for the migrant population in general and for the young migrant population in particular.

On the other hand, they point out that the Council of Ministers approved a package of economic and social measures focused on supporting companies and workers with the



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aim of reinforcing, complementing and extending their protection and thus counteracting the impact of COVID-19, with measures such as maintaining the ERTes, for example.

When asked whether or not they believe that the measures taken by governments were effective, the vast majority feel that they do not have enough information or knowledge to make a clear statement, and only one of the participants agrees that they were effective. Paradoxically, and as the conversation continues, 3 of the young people recognise that the measures taken had an impact on their community, namely on the preservation and/or recovery of employment, and that this in turn had a positive impact on the mental health of the population, which improved once their living conditions were secured.

As to whether the authorities have taken young people's opinions into account and asked them to contribute to determining what measures should be taken to help them, 4 of the young people answer that yes, they have been taken into account but only partially, while one of them answers categorically that they have not. As a matter of fact, in their opinion, young people with a migrant background or from disadvantaged backgrounds are not considered in comparison to the rest of the young people in the community.

As for what other measures they think should have been implemented to tackle the COVID-19 crisis, the responses are fairly unanimous. The young participants consider that, although measures related to employment and the recovery of employment have been approved, more would have been necessary, and they also highlight how useful it would have been to receive aid for access to housing, or for the payment of housing, especially for renting, which is the most widespread form among people of their age.

In short, the general feeling throughout the focus group is that, despite the fact that governments have approved measures to try to better cope with the situation generated by the COVID-19 pandemic in Spanish society, more could have been done, and the measures could have also been more diverse, going beyond the labour sphere. In addition, it is denounced to a certain extent that the disadvantaged population has continued to be disadvantaged in comparison to the rest of the population, and that this situation should be resolved in subsequent possible crises and, in general, in the country's day-to-day life.



## 4 Conclusion

The crisis caused by COVID-19 has marked a whole generation of young people, with important repercussions on their socialisation process and interpersonal relations, as well as on their education and working life. This will certainly have an impact on their civic and democratic participation, which will have to be addressed.

With regard to the measures approved by the government and the reaction of local communities to the crisis, it can be said that although local authorities did not have much decision-making power due to the way in which competences are distributed in Spain, the Spanish government responded with a Social Shield that mobilised public resources to develop measures in the areas of employment, equality, housing, credit, tax relief and economic activity, which local authorities complemented in their sphere of action.

Despite all this, both from the interview with the councillor and from the questionnaire or the focus group with young people, it can be deduced that even though measures were taken, they did not reach the majority of young people. It is clear that there is a problem of perception from young people, probably based on a major problem of communication failure from the public administrations, which have not been able to connect with nor been able to provide the young population with the necessary information to take advantage of the measures approved to combat the COVID-19 crisis. Only the ERTes (Temporary layoff scheme) are known on a larger scale, and in general the measures related to employment, but there is a great lack of knowledge about everything else. Housing subsidies, in some cases, have not reached the ears of young people, and in other cases the administrations have been too slow to implement them, which has led to a greater disaffection on the part of young people. In the case of the young cultural voucher, for example, according to an article in the newspaper *El País* of 3 November 2022, only 58 % of potential beneficiaries had accessed it<sup>14</sup>. Therefore, there are measures in place but there is no effective communication strategy.

We can affirm that there is a crisis of representation and disaffection among Spanish youth, who do not seem to feel close even to their local community. In fact, curiously and according to the results of the questionnaire and the focus group, young people seem to be more familiar with the measures approved by the central government.

We can conclude, therefore, that it is necessary for administrations, and especially local communities, to connect with the young population, improve their communication and reach out to them when it comes to approving measures that concern them, with a special

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<sup>14</sup> Bono, F., & Koch, T. (2022, noviembre 3). 281.557 jóvenes acceden al bono cultural del ministerio, el 58% de los posibles beneficiarios. Ediciones EL PAÍS S.L. <https://elpais.com/cultura/2022-11-03/281557-jovenes-acceden-al-bono-cultural-del-ministerio-el-58-de-los-posibles-beneficiarios.html>



emphasis on those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, as in that case the gap is much wider. It is also necessary to streamline the bureaucratic procedures that in many cases discourage young people from applying for the aid and resources to which they are entitled.

Finally, we can add that local communities also have to start taking measures not only about employability - which is indeed extremely important - but also accompanied by other types of measures related, for example, to training and skills acquisition, to access to first homes, to cultural and leisure activities, to mental health care, to the possibility of conciliation, and also to the access of young people to consultative and decision-making spaces.

In conclusion, Spain cannot leave its young people behind, because their non-future is everyone's problem, and the first step is in the local communities, which are the first ones they can turn to and which have to give a more immediate response to their problems and needs, as well as being able to help them develop their concerns into something tangible.



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