

**Research-based
analysis of European
youth programmes**

RESEARCH PROJECT ON THE IMPACT OF THE CORONA PANDEMIC ON YOUTH WORK IN EUROPE (RAY-COR)

LITERATURE REVIEW // SNAPSHOT 1

V4 | 14 AUGUST 2020

FOR INFORMATION AND BACKGROUND READING



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1. SUMMARY

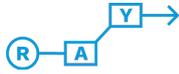
This literature review summarises a curated selection of currently available results of research on young people and youth work in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal of this literature review is to help understand the diversity of the ways young people are uniquely affected by pandemics, identify key recommendations for youth policy and provide a glimpse into the methods and practices youth work has adopted to help young people navigate these uncertain times.

Given the rapidly evolving situation regarding COVID-19, many research projects are currently ongoing. Therefore, this literature review can only be seen as a snapshot of an ever growing and changing body of literature. In many cases only preliminary or first wave data is available in the reviewed reports. We will consequently continue to amend, expand, and further develop this literature review in the coming months.

The overall trend emphasised in the literature highlights the growing disparities between reactions from general society and young people in response to containment measures, focusing on socialisation, mental health and well-being, and education and employment.

Key recommendations emerging from the literature include the need to recognise the massive toll the pandemic has had on the mental health of young people, ensure adequate funding and support through youth policy for these young people, incorporate young people in policy development and decision making for the recovery process, as well as develop innovative solutions that ensure youth work can fulfil its function as an essential service for young people.

Proposed avenues for further research include a diversification of geographic foci and greater explorations of how marginalised groups are managing the pandemic.



2. INTRODUCTION

The new coronavirus (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2, or SARS-CoV-2), and later named as Coronavirus Disease-19 or COVID-19 (Qiu, Chen. & Shi, 2020) has gripped the world in the first half of 2020. The world is going through unprecedented times: the coronavirus pandemic has taken people, governments, and societies by surprise – and youth work is no exception. Some of the immediate consequences of the pandemic, and the policy responses to the pandemic, have intermittently gained some visibility in the youth field in Europe, but the long-term impact and the effects in different regions of the world remain unclear. In order to properly evaluate the extraordinary circumstances young people and youth organisations now face in the wake of this pandemic, this literature review attempts a first look at emerging literature in order to chart new ground by looking at youth work in its entirety – including the European youth programmes.

In order to better understand the context of the reviewed literature, it is first important to look at the timeline of the current COVID-19 pandemic, which is followed by a brief overview of the history of pandemics in youth work. Next, a brief exploration of current completed studies of the pandemic as it relates to young people and youth work is presented. The reviewed literature is discussed in the following clusters: young people, youth policy, youth work, and European youth programmes. Finally, a brief discussion is presented to address some of the perceived current gaps in the available literature and evolving research projects.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1. THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

While influenza is a similar contagious respiratory illness, COVID-19 is caused by infection from SARS-CoV-2 (“Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)”, (2020).) COVID-19 belongs to the Coronaviruses (CoV) family including a wide range of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases (“Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic,” 2020). A closely related and familiar coronavirus is the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) caused by the SARS-CoV-1 responsible for the 2003-2004 epidemic in China. In order to contextualise the magnitude of the impact COVID-19 has had upon global life, Table 1 provides a general timeline of major events related to the pandemic.

Table 1: Timeline of the COVID-19 Pandemic

<p>Late December 2019/January 2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new coronavirus, later called COVID-19, is identified in Wuhan, China. • After the initial identification of the outbreak, it quickly spreads first to other Asian countries and then the rest of the world. • WHO declares a global public health emergency as the virus spreads to 18 countries.
<p>February 2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First coronavirus death is reported outside of China in the Philippines. • Death toll in mainland China surpasses the fatalities from the SARS outbreak in 2003. • Italy becomes the European epicentre of the outbreak.
<p>March 2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Countries across the globe implement lockdown measures (measures include: closing of shops, hotels, restaurants and schools; banning large events; and encouraging people to work from home when possible) as the number of cases spike. • The economic impact of the pandemic begins to be revealed. • Researchers across the globe rush to start the development of a vaccine.
<p>April 2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As the number of new infections and deaths related to COVID-19 begin to level off, countries begin to lift lockdown measures. However, many countries report record-breaking death toll numbers during this period. • Apple and Google partner to develop an API that allows the use of smartphone technology to trace the spread of the virus.

<p>May 2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempts are made to return life back to normal in some Asian and European countries as lockdown measures are further lifted, but COVID-19 continues to surge in the USA, Africa and Latin America. • Hotspot areas struggle to provide adequate care for the growing number of COVID-19 patients. • A United Nations report forecasted that the coronavirus pandemic will shrink the world economy by 3.2 percent this year, the sharpest contraction since the Great Depression in the 1930s. • A promising potential treatment for COVID-19 is tested in the USA. • The United Nations warned of a looming global mental health crisis as the world struggles to cope with the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.
<p>June 2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The World Health Organization broadened its recommendations for the use of masks during the coronavirus pandemic and said it is now advising that in areas where the virus is spreading, people should wear fabric masks when social distancing is not possible, such as on public transportation and in shops. • Cases of COVID-19 surge in countries such as Brazil, the USA, Iran, India, and many others. While New Zealand declares itself free of the coronavirus.

Source: Muccari, Chow & Murphy (2020)

The coronavirus spread rapidly from its origin in Wuhan, China. Governments across the globe quickly implemented measures to prevent the spread of this virus. Initially, Italy, France, Spain, and Germany ranked among the top 10 countries in terms of cases and deaths (Coronavirus Resource Center, John Hopkins University). As of July 2020, the top ten countries of confirmed cases are: the USA, Brazil, India, Russia, South Africa, Mexico, Chile, and the United Kingdom. Globally, the number of confirmed cases is over 17 million

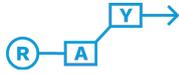
with over half a million deaths (John Hopkins University, 2020b). Table 2 shows a global count of the number of confirmed cases and deaths over time.

Table 2: Global Count of COVID-29

Late December 2019/ January 2020	11.950 confirmed cases 259 deaths
February 2020	86.606 confirmed cases 2.977 deaths
March 2020	862.818 confirmed cases 44.241 deaths
April 2020	3.258.029 confirmed cases 235.668 deaths
May 2020	6.243.768 confirmed cases 379.369 deaths
June 2020	10.573.707 confirmed cases 517.119 deaths
July 2020	17.039.160 confirmed cases 667.218 deaths

Source: John Hopkins University, 2020b

In order to slow the spread of COVID-19 and “flatten the curve” (John Hopkins University, 2020a), governments across the globe implemented several social distancing and lockdown measures. These social distancing measures meant the closure of businesses, schools, and other spaces of community and social life. Mass gatherings were prohibited and many states implemented travel bans. Life as we knew it was severely disrupted, leading to yet unknown but potentially long-lasting effects for everyone. However, these effects are not universally distributed, young people in particular have been known to be particularly vulnerable to such pandemic shocks (Sprang & Silman, 2013). In order to understand the emerging literature regarding COVID-19, a brief look at previous pandemic-related literature, young people, and youth work is vital.



3.2.THE HISTORY OF PANDEMICS, YOUNG PEOPLE & YOUTH WORK

Pandemics are not a new occurrence, however “of note is the shift in mortality and morbidity to younger age groups, which has been notable in both seasonal influenza and the recent influenza” (Sprang & Silman, 2013, p. 105). Despite the prevalence of pandemics and potential increased susceptibility of young people, previous research or studies on the effect of pandemics specifically on young people or youth work are not common. Sprang & Silman (2003) suggest “pandemic disasters are unique and do not include congregate sites for prolonged support and recovery, they require specific response strategies to ensure the behavioural health needs of children and families. Pandemic planning must address these needs and disease-containment measures” (p. 105). Preliminary review of the available literature demonstrates a prevalence of scientific approaches related to the current HIV/AIDS pandemic, specifically as it applies to South African countries, and mentions of policy recommendations based upon previous global influenza related pandemics.

In recent history, the most substantial studies of a pandemic and its effect on societies is the continuing HIV/AIDS pandemic. While considered a global issue, “the pandemic of HIV/AIDS is actually a composite of many regional and national-level epidemics. The progress made in many parts of the developed and developing world is tempered by the continued devastating consequences of HIV infection in sub-Saharan Africa” (Earls, Raviola, and Carlson, 2008, p. 295). Mental health, often from a psychiatric lens, is a common area of focus for researchers (Mawar, Sahay, Pandit & Mahajan, 2005; Earls et al., 2008; Mellins & Malee, 2013). Mental health is already a well-echoed concern for many researchers in the COVID-19 pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020; Decent Jobs for Youth, 2020).

Another common theme in the HIV/Aids literature looks at the development of educational programmes designed with the needs of young people to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS (Katjavivi & Otaala, 2003; Fetene & Dimitriadis, 2010). This literature seeks to address the “knowledge gap” in current approaches to educating young people in particular about the spread of HIV/AIDS. Fetene & Dimitriadis (2010) found in their qualitative survey that knowledge about safe sex practices and the dangers of HIV/AIDS are well known, but youth are so “inundated with such repetitive information from different sources so much so that some tune it out” (p. 431). These authors claim policy has failed to understand the shifting nature of gender relations as young people are experiencing a “emerging, cross-gender discourse of de-

sire” (Fetene & Dimitriadis, 2010, p. 434). However, this emerging sexual freedom still exists within a very conservative, patriarchal paradigm toward sexuality. Many young people, especially young females, claim to experience embarrassment in purchasing condoms so they simply go without. This study in particular highlights the problematic approach of global public policy, where one uses commensurable data sources to make claims about specific sites and populations around the world and fails to account for local realities. Bearing this approach in mind is a valuable practice in the development as researchers move forward in their study of COVID-19.

A second relevant vein of pandemic-related literature looks at the growing inclination of influenza related pandemics that have occurred in the 20th and 21st century. These notable influenza related pandemics include:

- 1918–1920: Spanish flu (H1N1) resulting in estimated 40–50 million deaths
- 1957–1958: Asian flu (H2N2) resulting in estimated 1.1 million deaths
- 1968–1970: Hong Kong flu resulting in estimated 1 million deaths
- 2009–2010: Swine flu (H1N1) resulting in estimated 200,000 deaths (LePan, 2020).

This cluster of research delves into policy, suggesting recommendations and changes centred upon the unique experience of young people in the wake of increased potentiality for influenza-based pandemics (Bruce-Barrett, Matlow, Rafman & Samson, 2007; Koller, Nicholas, Gearing, and Kalfa, 2010; Sprang & Silman, 2013). The most notable findings of Sprang and Silman (2013) highlight the anxiety and fear young people and children face in the wake of so much uncertainty generated by the pandemic, which could have long-lasting effects in terms of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Bearing this in mind, studies by Bruce-Barrett et al. (2007) and Koller et al. (2010) critically point out the need to include young people and children in the development of pandemic responses, as pandemics continue to disproportionately affect children and young people.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Given the rapidly evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, available research on the effects on young people and youth work is constantly advancing as well as shifting. The emerging research spans in scope from the global to the regional and national level. Given the extensive and not yet fully known magnitude of effects COVID-19 has had on every aspect of life, much

of the literature to date has chosen to be more generally focused. Popular thematic approaches include mental health and well-being, everyday life, political attitudes, and impacts on education and employment. By far, the two most popular themes are mental health/well-being and employment/education. For analysis, we have organised available literature into three clusters, with their primary focus on young people, youth policy, and youth work, respectively. Methodological approaches are as varied, with many researchers choosing to utilise mixed-method approaches rather than exclusively qualitative or quantitative methodologies. Due to strict social distancing measures, nearly all of the surveyed literature has drawn on online surveys or other digital means of communication to collect data.

4.1. DATA & LITERATURE AVAILABILITY

The availability of new data and literature regarding the pandemic and its impact on society is being added to daily. The OECD, United Nations, and World Health Organization have compiled resource centres on their websites publishing new research, facilitating collaboration between researchers, and ensuring reliable information on the pandemic can be easily accessible. Some projects, such as the Mannheim Corona study, were able to integrate research questions on COVID-19 into already established research projects (Blom, Gathmann & Krieger, 2020). It is important to keep in mind that the COVID-19 pandemic is a current, ongoing event. This literature review summarises a curated selection of the published reports currently available, with several known projects currently being in progress and many more in development.

4.2. THE PANDEMIC AND YOUNG PEOPLE

When discussing young people during the COVID-19 pandemic, the existing literature primarily attempts to contextualise the pandemic response in the lives of young people. Mental health and well-being dominate current research at the national level (Reznik, Gritsenko, Konstantinov, Khamenka & Isralowitz, 2020, Gualano, Lo Moro, Voglino, , Bert & Siliquini, 2020; Liang, Ren, Cao, Hu, Qin, Li, Mei, 2020; Liu, Zhang, Wong, Hyun, Hahm, 2020; Franic & Dodig-Curkovic, 2020). Similar to the discussions in HIV/AIDS pandemic and mental health literature, these approaches take a scientific psychological lens to explore rates of depression, sleeplessness, and post-traumatic stress disorder among young people, both as a result of the pandemic itself and of the implemented social distancing measures to contain the spread of the virus. These studies echo some of the findings in research on the

HIV/AIDS pandemic. According to the WHO, society in general faces increased likelihood of social stigma for those who test positive for COVID-19 (World Health Organization, 2020). This stigma is further compounded for young people especially, given the ongoing narrative of young people as “super spreaders” of the virus (Shield, 2020; Lau, Grenfell, Nelson & Lopman, 2020).

Anxiety regarding the economy is a threat to young people now and possibly in the future. As of April 2020, “youth unemployment rate surged by 5.5 percentage points (to 17.6%), compared to an increase of 2.7 percentage points for people aged 25 and above” during the lockdown period (OECD, 2020d). Additionally, the looming threat of substantial economic instability adds to stressors for young people already anxious about economic problems that may not be felt in the older generation’s lifetime (Franic & Dodig-Curkovic, 2020).

While many youth-related surveys are in the medical field, the Decent Jobs for Youth Initiative has, together with a range of policy partners including the European Youth Forum, conducted a global survey on Youth and COVID-19 with a more holistic perspective. The just-released survey report (August 2020) names as global key findings struggles with equal access to education, a deterioration of employment opportunities and perspectives, evaporating spaces for youth engagement, and a growing mental health challenge fueled by all three developments (Decent Jobs for Youth, 2020).

A particularly interesting and complementary approach from the social science perspective is a research project by Thomas, Clamp, Morridadi, Hagh-dadi, Mycock & Loughran (2020). Their research project, based in the United Kingdom for Beatfreak Youth Trends, encompassed a survey for young people, an open space for young people to engage and share experiences of the pandemic, as well as a two-week diary entry programme based on prompts for 11 young people across the UK. Their analysis consisted of understanding youth responses to information consumption regarding COVID-19 and social distancing, relationships, mental health, social responsibility, and education. They received 1880 responses to their online survey composed of 34 questions with scale, multiple choice, open ended, and multiple response options. While their findings reiterate the growing mental health concerns, they also highlight positive social implications for young people, such as relationships fostering positive outlooks on the future and 51% of young people making more of an effort to support those in need (Thomas, Clamp, Morridadi, Hagh-dadi, Mycock & Loughran, 2020, p. 13).

Overall, the present literature reveals a growing education, employment and mental health crisis that will require substantial investment from youth policy and youth work to address.

4.3. THE PANDEMIC AND YOUTH POLICY

Policy developments in the literature is currently more commonly explored at the global scale. Comparing existing global data to recent surveys conducted via the internet during the pandemic, the OECD and UN were able to generate potential policy recommendations focused on the specific needs of young people and children. Policy and decision makers need to be particularly aware of the intergenerational solidarity component when creating a recovery response, especially since young people and children will likely face more of the long-term outcomes of the pandemic.

The OECD has produced a series of studies, policy reports, and digital media addressing COVID-19's effects on education (OECD, 2020a; OECD, 2020b; OECD, 2020c), international trade, and public trust in government. The culmination of these works and a survey of 90 youth organisations in 48 countries from 7th to 20th of April 2020 form the basis of the OECD's policy brief "Youth and COVID-19: Response, Recovery and Resilience". This report gauges the disproportionate effects the pandemic has on young people and likely implications for intergenerational solidarity and justice. First, the policy brief establishes the major concerns expressed by young people according to youth organisations. Overwhelmingly, youth organisations stated youth expressed greatest concerns on mental health, employment and disposable income in the immediate sense (Allam, Ader & Igrioglu, 2020, p. 7), while in the long-term, these concerns turn toward future well-being, international cooperation and solidarity (Allam, Ader & Igrioglu, 2020, p. 11). From the OECD's perspective, governments should be mindful of the role age has in the aftermath of handling the COVID-19 crisis. Of vital importance is the need for an intergenerational lens and consultation of young people and youth organisations in the recovery and rebuilding efforts post-pandemic. In particular, the authors highlight the need for age-disaggregated data to critically assess programming effectiveness in addition to giving young people a platform to convey their needs to policy makers. This study paints a poignant picture of avenues of support for researchers and youth organisations in tackling the critical disproportionate effects the pandemic has upon young people.

Additionally, the United Nations (UN) has published a policy brief on The Impact of COVID-19 on children, focused upon how harmful effects of the pandemic are expected to be most damaging for children in already disadvantaged or vulnerable situations. According to the UN there are three main channels in which children are affected by the crisis: infection with the

virus itself; the immediate socioeconomic impacts of measures to stop transmission of the virus and end the pandemic; and the potential longer-term effects of delayed implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (UNICEF, 2020). Vulnerable children face greater chances of falling into poverty or extreme poverty; increases in the learning crisis as schools are closed in an attempt to contain the virus, threats to their health and survival; economic hardships resulted from an economic downturn leading rates of death and rising malnutrition; and risk to their safety due to lockdown and shelter in places measure increasing risk of violence and abuse. Proposed immediate and sustained actions for the attention of governments and policymakers include: expanding social protections and programmes that reach the most vulnerable children; prioritise child-centred services, with a particular focus on equity of access; and provide support to parents and caregivers.

In both policy briefs, the long-term outcomes of the crisis are very much tied to the short-term responses of policy to provide adequate support in the present.

4.4. THE PANDEMIC AND YOUTH WORK

Another cluster of literature comes from surveys of youth work organisations to explore their adaptations to social distancing measures and short, medium, and long-term goals in the wake of the pandemic. Much of the literature in this cluster is on the national or local scope, with one European level study. From the surveyed literature, it remains clear that digital and technological innovations are key in moving forward. However, funding and digital innovation are currently lacking in youth work organisations. In response to the containing COVID-19, many governments failed to recognise the valuable and essential work of youth work organisations. Like many facets of life, youth work organisations sought to engage young people digitally in order to provide critical and much needed services. But greater investment in digital infrastructures is needed, both from the organisations themselves and government, in order to reach more diverse populations. These research projects highlight the already present digital divide young people from vulnerable or disadvantaged groups face, which has only been amplified in the wake of COVID-19.

The first study by Building on Rainbows: Supporting Children's Participation in Shaping Responses to COVID-19 survey had 95 respondents from professionals in 16 different sectors surveyed in one week of April 2020 in 20 European countries. 30% of respondents showed examples of children's participation in the promotion of wellbeing, information design, shaping services

and critique practices related to the COVID-19 response. However, there was little evidence these practices influenced public decision making. Children from especially vulnerable situations face additional exposures. Of those challenges faced, digital exclusion was the most highlighted barrier to education, especially in times of distance learning. Children also expressed worries regarding a need for more information, particularly in regard to assurances for basic needs and income of the family. Furthermore, the health of children in vulnerable groups is of concern with access to support for care and safety becoming limited under social distancing. This study demonstrates the difficulties and uncertainty faced by children in times of COVID-19. Of particular note is how the intersections of vulnerabilities some groups face can exasperate difficult situations without adequate solution from governments. When looking at the example of digital education options, many children in vulnerable groups simply do not have the access or infrastructure in place to attend school digitally, further adding to inequalities. Furthermore, in the literature youth work organisations advocate for better engagement from policy and decision makers toward youth voices and concerns.

Two national studies of note by Youth Link Scotland and UK Youth present surveys attempting to identify responses to the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspective of youth work organisations. The UK National Youth Agency (2020) study titled *Out of Sight? Vulnerable Young People: COVID-19 Response* focuses upon young people in England around the topics of social interaction, support and mental health/well-being. According to their report, the pandemic has not only amplified the vulnerability of young people, but has significantly increased their need for supportive services. The recommendations proposed would require clear government guidance and plan to support youth workers in terms of training and up-skilling in response to COVID-19. Additionally, the government needs to provide a comprehensive exit strategy from the lockdown that listens to the concerns of young people and includes them in the decision-making process. This study is helpful in assessing the current and future support that would be needed in the post COVID-19 world.

Representing youth work organisations and services across Scotland, Youthlink's (2020) *The Covid-19 Crisis: Impact on Youth Work and Young People*, A survey of Scotland's Youth Work Sector Leaders looks at the organisational effects of the pandemic. In the context of increasing budget cuts to youth work organisations in Scotland prior to the pandemic, optimism regarding the climate of youth work in and after the pandemic is wavering. 1 in 3 youth work leaders believe there will be a detrimental impact on young people's mental health because of lockdown. This is particularly dangerous

given that 70% believe there will be cuts to youth work services and budgets post Covid-19. While 92% have moved services online, 60% of local authority youth work services are struggling with digital barriers in connecting with young people. Together this paints a bleak picture of the continued service needed by young people in the future. This study calls attention to the funding crisis in youth work, before, during, and after the pandemic. Funding priority post Covid-19 may not include youth work as budgets are stretched further in an effort to stave off growing economic instability. However, the literature is vastly in agreement that youth workers will be more critical than ever as more young people will require support.

Similarly, between 20-27 March 2020, UK Youth surveyed the needs of the youth sector and young people in the wake of COVID-19 to identify potential long-term impacts. A total of 252 respondents, representing 235 organisations, including network, membership and infrastructure organisations completed the survey. Organisations represented span the spectrum of size from micro to large. The first portion of the study explores the impact of the lockdown on young people themselves, with primary concerns being the long-term effects of isolation on wellbeing and mental health, and uncertainty about employment. In terms of youth sector organisations themselves, future prospects are also uncertain. A vast majority of organisational respondents forecasted cuts to staff, funding and services in the post-COVID-19 world.

The pressing need for greater support for youth work is even seen at the local level. The Leicestershire Cares' (2020) rapid assessment: Life under Lockdown, consulted 28 vulnerable young people from their current projects to assess how the lockdown affected them, the challenges they faced, and the support they found useful. Findings indicate young people's experience with the lockdown varied but common issues include high levels of burden, loss of routine, and increased anxiety. Some reported positive aspects of the lockdown including the opportunity to fill skill gaps and expand their resume, taking time to be creative, or allowing them to reflect positively and appreciate the health of family and friends more when the lockdown lifted. Key to the work of this group was an effective response of the staff to adapt remote working practices to adequately support young people while providing a range of social activities. This research takes many of the concerns of young people as an important guideline for ensuring services and support remain available throughout the lockdown and afterwards.

4.5. THE PANDEMIC AND EUROPEAN YOUTH PROGRAMMES

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound effect on the learning mobility of young people across Europe. The Erasmus Student Network's Gabriels & Benke-Aberg's Student Exchanges in Times of Crisis - Research report on the impact of COVID-19 on student exchanges in Europe examines the changing situations for students/trainees on current exchanges. With 21.930 respondents to their closed question online survey from 19th to 30th March 2020, the Erasmus Student Network asked international exchange students/trainees who either were abroad during the spring of 2020, or who were supposed to be on an exchange but had their studies cancelled. While, almost two thirds of the students' mobility periods continued. A quarter of them were cancelled. Throughout the duration of the survey, certain trends were slowly emerging. On the first day of the data collection, 47% of respondents indicated they were staying, at the end of the survey this had dropped to 39%, a drop of nearly 8.5 percentage points. On the other hand, the amount of students indicating they returned home increased from 37% on the 19th of March to 43% of respondents on the 30th of March 2020. For 25% of the respondents, their mobility was cancelled, either by themselves, by their sending university, by their hosting university or by someone else (national authorities, both universities...). This number includes mobilities that are temporarily cancelled, postponed to the next semester, or were reported as cancelled in any other form. However, these were not as smooth exchanges as hoped for, where more than 37% of the students experienced at least one major problem related to their exchange. The most common one was related to the loss of transportation to return home, followed by problems with accommodation and problems with access to basic needs such as food and sanitary products. Information and communication were overwhelmingly cited as vital to students/trainees during their exchanges. Due to the constantly evolving situation across different countries, respondents required frequent updates that were not always accessible. This is highlighted in respondents answers regarding funding and grants: 7% of the students reported that they will not get any grant at all for their studies. The COVID-19 pandemic created great disarray within the Erasmus program, which effective communication helped to alleviate to some extent. As in previous studies, the question of digital accessibility and adaptation is again brought to the forefront.

Complementing this study is the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps' (2020) Survey on the impact of COVID-19 on learning mobility activities, which found similar results. The target group for this survey was project

participants and project hosts/organisers involved in in Erasmus+ or European Solidarity Corps funded projects, of which 11.800 responded to the survey. 75% of surveyed participants' mobility activities were affected by the pandemic: 42% continued activities with different arrangements, 22% had activities suspended, and 36% had their activities cancelled. 75% of the affected participants returned back home, whereas around 25% of the affected participants stayed abroad. Surveyed participants had generally positive reviews of digital activities, but 81% missed person-to-person interaction. European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+ youth/non formal learning activities participants seem more satisfied with the information, support, guidance provided to them, especially from organisations of former Erasmus+ or European Solidarity Corps participants (90%) and local organisations (87%). However, questions of funding were still prevalent. For future prospective in handing learning mobility in a pandemic, a majority of respondents would have postponed the start of their exchange. This is particularly important to consider when adapting policies in any future pandemic planning.

From the perspective of European high education institutions, the European Commission's survey on the impact of COVID-19 on European Universities provides insights into the adaptation methods from the educators point of view. Response rates to their survey were high, with 93 respondents from all 17 alliances. Overall, more than 60% of universities believed being a European University was a vital asset in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The most advantageous attribute being the ability to collaborate and share innovation and strategies to move toward greater online implementation of activities. In particular, 90% of respondents would find it useful that Erasmus+ supports blended mobility formats (i.e. short physical mobility, blended with virtual mobility) as from this autumn already. This survey along with literature from the OECD (OECD, 2020a; OECD, 2020b; OECD, 2020c) highlights the growing need to accelerate digital transformation of education, while being mindful of the digital divide in society.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This first review of available literature on COVID-19, young people and youth work detail the various facets of research that is currently available. At the youth level, research follows the trends of past pandemic literature and currently focuses on the emerging mental health issues and unique susceptibility of young people. At the policy level, more literature and data is needed to ensure policy and decision makers that youth work and support is essential work during a pandemic disaster such as COVID-19. Furthermore,

space must be created for young people themselves to provide input on recovery plans in the post-COVID-19 world. At the organisational level of youth work, emphasis on collaboration, communication and innovation in the youth field is key. The field of youth work is changing with a greater need for creative adaptation to potential unknowns in the circumstances of the pandemic. What has been common to recent cases of adaptation is the embracing of digital means of outreach, which can however deepen already existing or open new disparities between different groups of young people.

Bearing in mind that the COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing, there are many possible themes and regions left to be explored. In order to track ongoing developments in this field, new databanks¹ compiling existing and pending studies on COVID-19 in diverse themes are increasingly available. Currently, much of the research is focused upon the global north where comprehensive research on other geographic areas is limited and studies specifically on young people is even rarer. Furthermore, with the exception of children identified as a special vulnerable group, other marginalised groups are virtually absent from current discussions of COVID-19. Several organisations and researchers were quick to develop and disseminate surveys in a first attempt to explore the impacts of the pandemic on young people, youth work and youth policy. Thus, the reviewed literature illustrates only a first snapshot of more comprehensive things to come.

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