REPORT

on the impact of COVID-19 closures of educational, cultural, youth and sports activities on children and young people in the EU (2022/2004(INI))

Committee on Culture and Education

Rapporteur: Hannes Heide
CONTENTS

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION ...................................................... 3
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT ................................................................................................ 18
INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE ...................................... 21
FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE ........................................... 22
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the impact of COVID-19 closures of educational, cultural, youth and sports activities on children and young people in the EU (2022/2004(INI))

The European Parliament,

– having regard to Articles 2, 3 and 5(3) of the Treaty on European Union,
– having regard to Articles 165, 166 and 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
– having regard to Articles 14, 15 and 32 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
– having regard to the European Pillar of Social Rights, in particular principles 1, 3 and 4 thereof,
– having regard to its resolution of 17 April 2020 on EU coordinated action to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences1,
– having regard to its resolution of 8 October 2020 on the Youth Guarantee2,
– having regard to its resolution of 10 February 2021 on the impact of COVID-19 on youth and on sport3,
– having regard to its resolution of 17 February 2022 on empowering European youth: post-pandemic employment and social recovery4,
– having regard to its resolution of 20 May 2021 on the right of information of the Parliament regarding the ongoing assessment of the national recovery and resilience plans5,
– having regard to Decision (EU) 2021/2316 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 December 2021 on a European Year of Youth (2022)6,
– having regard to the proposal for a Council recommendation of 10 December 2021 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability

3 OJ C 465, 17.11.2021, p. 82.
4 Texts adopted, P9_TA(2022)0045.
(COM(2021)0770) and to the accompanying staff working document (SWD(2021)0367),

– having regard to the news article of 7 April 2020 entitled ‘COVID-19: how can VET respond?’, published by the Commission’s Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion7,


– having regard to the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Survey on the impact of COVID-19 on learning mobility8,

– having regard to the forthcoming Commission communication on long-term care and childhood education and care,

– having regard to the study entitled ‘Education and youth in post-COVID-19 Europe – crisis effects and policy recommendations’, published by its Directorate-General for Internal Policies on 4 May 20219,

– having regard to the study entitled ‘Youth in Europe: Effects of COVID-19 on their economic and social situation’, published by its Directorate-General for Internal Policies on 24 September 202110,

– having regard to the study entitled ‘Cultural and creative sectors in post-COVID-19 Europe – crisis effects and policy recommendations’, published by its Directorate-General for Internal Policies on 18 February 202111,

– having regard to the NESET Ad hoc report no. 3/2021 entitled ‘Distance learning from a student perspective’12,


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– having regard to the European Expert Network on Economics of Education (EENEE) and NESET analytical report entitled ‘The impact of COVID-19 on the education of disadvantaged children and the socio-economic consequences thereof’14,

– having regard to the Joint Research Centre technical report entitled ‘The likely impact of COVID-19 on education: Reflections based on the existing literature and recent international datasets’15,

– having regard to the European Youth Forum report of 17 June 2021 entitled ‘Beyond Lockdown: the “pandemic scar” on young people’16,


– having regard to the OECD policy brief of 12 May 2021 entitled ‘Supporting young people’s mental health through the COVID-19 crisis’18,

– having regard to the Young Minds survey of February 2021 entitled ‘Coronavirus: Impact on young people with mental health needs’19,

– having regard to the Horizon 2020 project entitled ‘Prevention of child mental health problems in Southeastern Europe – Adapt, Optimise, Test, and Extend Parenting for Lifelong Health’20,

– having regard to the Mental Health Foundation Scotland report of September 2020 entitled ‘Impacts of lockdown on the mental health and well-being of children and young people’21,

– having regard to the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) research report of 9 November 2021 entitled ‘Impact of COVID-19 on young people in the EU’22,
– having regard to the YouMoveEurope campaign on the International Youth Work Trainers Guild petition ‘Responding to the Impact of COVID-19 on International Youth Work Mobility’ 23,

– having regard to its resolution of 23 November 2021 on EU sports policy: assessment and possible ways forward24,

– having regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular Article 12 thereof,

– having regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 20 November 1989, in particular Article 30 thereof,

– having regard to Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee25,

– having regard to its resolution of 8 July 2020 on the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities and their families in the COVID-19 crisis26,

– having regard to the European Youth Goals, in particular Goals 5, 9 and 11,

– having regard to its resolution of 17 September 2020 on the cultural recovery of Europe27,

– having regard to its resolution of 22 October 2020 on the future of European education in the context of COVID-1928,

– having regard to its resolution of 25 March 2021 on shaping digital education policy29,

– having regard to its resolution of 20 October 2021 on the situation of artists and the cultural recovery in the EU30,

– having regard to the OECD project ‘Student Agency for 2030’,

– having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,

– having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education (A9-0216/2022),

A. whereas the closure of early childhood education and care provision facilities, schools, universities, spaces for youth welfare and youth work, as well as of extracurricular activities, cultural spaces and sports facilities, has denied children and young people the opportunity to participate in activities which are essential for their overall development,

30 OJ C 184, 5.5.2022, p. 88.
their learning progression, their intellectual, physical, emotional and mental health and
well-being, and their social and professional inclusion;

B. whereas children and young people are among the most vulnerable groups in our society
and have been impacted by COVID-19-related closures during a crucial and critical
period of their lives; whereas mental health is one of the preconditions for and
foundations of a healthy society and democracy; whereas access to mental health
services is therefore inseparable from other basic rights;

C. whereas the cancellation of educational, cultural, youth and sports activities and events
intensified the digital transition to such an extent that it abruptly changed daily routines,
as well as the way in which children and young people interact and communicate with
each other, without social or physical contacts; whereas the closure of schools, spaces
for culture and sports facilities hosting such activities and events has reduced the levels
of physical fitness in young people to such an extent that currently only one in four 11-
year-olds carries out enough physical activity; whereas this has led to one in three
children being overweight or obese, increasing the risk of factor for disability and
greater morbidity31;

D. whereas education ranked among the most emotionally draining sectors during the
COVID-19 pandemic32 and research shows a clear connection between the mental
health of teachers and that of students33; whereas distance education has inherent
limitations in the teaching of laboratory and art courses, as well as vocational and
physical education; whereas distance education is in many cases pedagogically
unsuitable, especially for younger students, who have a greater need for interpersonal
contact with the teacher, and owing to the lack of opportunities for teachers to be
adequately trained to use digital tools effectively in schools; whereas in most cases,
distance learning did not take into account the needs of learners who receive education
in regional or minority languages; whereas this approach can be considered
discriminatory and creates distress, anxiety and a sense of insecurity in those learners;

E. whereas having no fixed daily timetable which creates a reassuring ‘routine’, and with
the custom of attending school for long periods having been lost in some Member
States, now that the schools have opened once again, many students seem to be
‘detached’, uninterested in school life and are having difficulties in finding their pace, in
concentrating, in feeling a sense of belonging and in sharing the goals of the school
community;

F. whereas the closure of cultural venues – which were the first to be closed and the last to
be allowed to reopen – has denied young cultural creators and, in particular, young
performers the opportunity to commence and develop their careers at this crucial early
stage;

G. whereas grassroots sports were severely affected by the negative consequences of the
pandemic, with many of them being completely closed for a long time; whereas
professional sports clubs, especially at local and regional level, are still expected to cope
with serious challenges regarding their financial recovery in the longer term; whereas

31 WHO European Regional Obesity Report 2022.
the permanent loss of grassroots sports would have a direct impact on young athletes, both in terms of their social development and of their potential future professional career in sports;

H. whereas the overall state of young people’s mental health and well-being has significantly worsened during the pandemic, with problems related to mental health doubling in several Member States compared to pre-crisis levels\(^{34}\), leading pundits to call this the ‘silent pandemic’ or the ‘pandemic scar’; whereas the pandemic has exposed the lack of support provided to young people experiencing issues connected to mental health; whereas marginalised groups, such as LGBTIQ+, racial and ethnic minorities or young people with special needs, have been subjected to a higher risk of developing a mental health disorder; whereas the real consequences of mental health issues for young people are often difficult to identify and, to date, are not yet fully visible;

I. whereas the excessive pressure put on learners to over-perform, even from a young age, has put additional strain on learners’ mental health and well-being; whereas mental health difficulties carry a strong stigma in our societies, leading young people living with mental health issues also to be subjected to prejudice, social isolation, verbal abuse or bullying, and to experiencing learning settings as an unsafe environment in which it is difficult to seek help or treatment;

J. whereas there are vast discrepancies between Member States’ specific situations, owing to the differing nature and duration of the measures put in place, as well as to differences in access to technology and digital tools, which accentuate rural-urban inequalities;

K. whereas the forced shift to virtual learning has not only exacerbated already existing inequalities, but has also created new ones by leaving children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds behind as a result of cramped housing conditions, the lack of digital infrastructure or equipment and connectivity issues, increasing the risk of low learning outcomes and consequently of drop-out among learners with fewer opportunities;

L. whereas the closure of learning institutions has led to a reduction in existing knowledge, a loss of the methodology to acquire new knowledge and an actual loss of learning; whereas these losses, which are likely to have a long-term negative impact on the future well-being of children and young people, are higher among learners from socio-economically disadvantaged households, who received less support with their studies during the pandemic;

M. whereas it has been observed that 64 % of young people in the 18-34 age group were at risk of depression in spring 2021\(^ {35} \) and that suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people\(^ {36} \) as a result of stress, loneliness, isolation, depression, psychological distress, the lack of educational, employment or financial opportunities

\(^{34}\) [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/1e1eb53-en/1/2/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/1e1eb53-en&_csp_=c628e9f9bcf7362d2d2c28e912508d45f6&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/1e1eb53-en/1/2/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/1e1eb53-en&_csp_=c628e9f9bcf7362d2d2c28e912508d45f6&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book)


\(^{36}\) UNICEF article ‘The Mental Health Burden Affecting Europe’s Children’ (4 October 2021).
and the increase in youth unemployment, as well as of uncertainties among young people linked to wider social and life prospects;

N. whereas significant regional gaps exist across the EU in access to mental health services, while access by patients from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, including children, is further limited by the constraints which exist in some Member States in relation to reimbursements of psychotherapy sessions from public health budgets; whereas there is significant need for a European approach regarding mental health for children and young people, with a particular focus on education and school and youth counselling;

O. whereas the lockdown measures had a particularly negative impact on persons with disabilities or special needs; whereas any measures taken by Member States during exceptional circumstances should always respect their fundamental rights and ensure their equal and non-discriminatory access to health care, social services and education, as well as to youth, cultural and sports activities;

P. whereas gender-related differences have an impact on how children and young people have been affected by the pandemic, with girls and young women suffering more from domestic violence, psychosomatic illnesses and mood disorders; whereas the gender pay gap deteriorated further during the pandemic, affecting women’s work-life balance and their financial dependence on their partners, relatives or friends; whereas the successive lockdowns increased the burden on parents and guardians, which exacerbated the risk of parental substance abuse and intra-familial violence affecting the mental health and well-being of the most vulnerable, as well as of children and young people;

Q. whereas mental health problems at an early stage of personal development increase the likelihood of mental health issues occurring in adulthood, with far-reaching consequences as regards personal, social and professional development and quality of life; whereas children and young people are going through critical phases of their neurological development and are particularly sensitive to the large-scale use of digital tools for distance learning; whereas this intense digitalisation of education gives rise to questions regarding the impact of technology on learning issues;

R. whereas closures have reduced the levels of physical fitness in young people to such an extent that currently only one in four 11-year-olds carries out enough physical activity;

S. whereas 2022 is the European Year of Youth;

T. whereas any EU mental health strategy aimed at children and young people must first and foremost provide them with opportunities to be heard and their input taken into account in the elaboration of inclusive responses; whereas a successful strategy must involve parents, families, friends, youth organisations and youth welfare services, youth workers, cultural institutions and sports clubs, in addition to schools and teachers, by providing them with appropriate training related to how to deal with mental health issues, in order to both establish a holistic approach and ensure that young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and marginalised groups are reached;

U. whereas scientific data suggests that levels of institutional trust among members of the younger generations have fallen; whereas this is caused by the stress and uncertainty linked to the pandemic itself but also by the limited effectiveness of Member States’ official communication channels in reaching the younger generation, as well as the increase in disinformation and fake news pertaining to the pandemic; whereas special attention needs to be devoted to regaining that trust, which can be achieved through age-appropriate participation, including by offering young people opportunities to take initiatives and decisions shaping the world they live in and promoting youth agency in order to empower young people to seek self-determination and develop resilience;

V. whereas the pandemic has provided us with an opportunity to address long-standing mental health-related issues that had previously not been addressed in a holistic manner; whereas mental health has been included in the specific objectives of the EU4Health programme, contributing to building a European health union based on stronger, more accessible and resilient health systems standing ready to face up to possible future crises;

W. whereas the war in Ukraine and its devastating human, food, energy and financial consequences, as well as other global threats, can result in uncertainties which are expected to have a further negative impact on the mental health and well-being of children and young people;

X. whereas the war in Ukraine has led to millions of children and young people being displaced and experiencing extensive trauma;

1. Draws attention to the role played by schools and early childhood education and care institutions, as well as non-formal and informal learning institutions, in providing young people and their families with the necessary material and psychological support, and calls on the Member States and regions to provide sufficient financial support to mainstream education institutions, in particular through significant investment in public education, and to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers and education personnel, in order to ensure that the pedagogical, psychological, physical, emotional, cognitive and/or social development of young people is increasingly promoted in a satisfactory way;

2. Urges the Member States, in this context, to substantially increase public spending in education and training to above the EU average (5 % of GDP in 2020); underlines, in particular, the role played by teachers, educators and youth workers in contributing to the psychological support and development of children and young people; in this regard, stresses the need to recognise the importance of promoting the mental health literacy of teachers, education personnel, school administrators, social workers and youth workers, as well as of learners;

3. Calls on the Member States and the Commission to break the silence surrounding mental health issues and eliminate the associated discriminative social stigma in a holistic approach; calls, therefore, on the Commission and the Member States to launch an EU-wide campaign to raise awareness of mental health in educational and vocational institutions in order to combat the existing stigma, to provide young people with access to mental health information and to create a clear and broader social understanding of mental health issues; invites the Member States to include psychological first aid and
stigma-free mandatory mental health education in curricula, so that learners, teachers, professors, trainers and academic leaders are better prepared to respond to learners and young people who experience mental health issues, thereby ensuring equal promotion of citizens’ mental health and well-being across the EU; calls on the Member States to adapt the content of the curricula, to take all necessary measures to close the cognitive gaps created during distance learning and to prevent the possible increase in school failure and school drop-out; insists that Member States ensure access to inclusive and equitable quality education for every child in Europe;

4. Stresses the importance of countering the phenomenon of under-reporting regarding mental health and well-being, as well as the under-representation of children and young people in mental health scientific research; calls, therefore, on the Commission to conduct research with a complete assessment of the long-term effects of all preventive measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic taken by the Member States on children and young people, in order to mitigate the effects of any future health crisis;

5. Underlines the challenges involved in measuring mental health and well-being, and calls on the Commission and the Member States to develop a common holistic understanding of health and safety that includes overall physical, mental and social well-being, and requires comprehensive prevention and healing strategies, including the development of unbiased indicators to measure mental health and well-being, risk assessment tools and reporting systems, in consultation with teachers, learners, parents and experts and scientists with a relevant specialisation, and the integration of cultural, play and sporting activities, and promoting the development of creative and social skills;

6. Underlines the need to sustainably and rapidly reconstruct and strengthen the structure of European youth work that has been weakened or even destroyed by the pandemic; emphasises that youth work itself needs to be recognised for what it is: a support tool that makes an important contribution to young people’s personal development, well-being and self-realisation; calls, therefore, on the Member States to implement concrete improvements in youth work in order to provide support to those who need it most;

7. Calls for open youth work to be recognised throughout the EU as a central means of socialisation for young people and to consciously and increasingly create free spaces for young people, often for those of the same age, beyond the parental home and places of learning in formal education, which open up opportunities for them to organise themselves and participate in community initiatives;

8. Calls, in this regard, on the Member States to improve and further develop the framework for health and safety in learning environments in order to provide learners, teachers, young people and professionals with the support of a sufficient number of qualified staff members, such as specialist psychologists or other mental health specialists, who can play a vital role not only for the individuals, but also for the overall school climate, in order to create a safe environment for children and young people in all types of education institutions, where learners can seek psychological help in the early stages of mental issues; calls on the Member States to provide special educational needs support staff who can contribute to making classrooms and social spaces a welcoming and attractive place in which to grow, learn, exchange views in an environment of trust, and discuss and overcome differences constructively; highlights the importance of low-threshold, semi-professional psychological support for learners;
calls for the establishment of an active European network for exchanging best practices and methods to deal with such challenges;

9. Acknowledges that giving young people a voice in decision-making, so that they can express their needs and participate in their implementation, is key to improving the effectiveness of policies and programmes; calls, therefore, on learning institutions to extend the participation and co-determination rights of students and young people in schools, universities, vocational training, the workplace and social institutions, and to involve young people, especially young women, in research and programme design in order to better understand and respond to their life experiences, priorities and perceptions, so as to ensure their engagement;

10. Urges the Member States to promote cross-sectoral investments to tackle mental disorders among children and young people, and to build up national action plans ensuring their implementation at the regional and local level, accommodating the actual needs of children and young people, with special regard to the most disadvantaged groups; calls on the Commission and the Member States to support the work of youth organisations and the youth work organised in non-governmental organisations themselves more systematically and, above all, given their importance for non-formal and informal learning, also financially, and therefore to make their structures of cross-border exchange and cooperation more crisis-resistant in the long term;

11. Underlines the vital importance of non-virtual interpersonal activities and relationships in daily life among children and young people for their overall well-being, which constitutes the basis of the process of socialisation and accelerates the experience of a sense of belonging, taking into account the important role of socialisation in education; therefore, calls on the Member States to take appropriate health and safety measures to ensure that in the event of future pandemics or other unprecedented situations, all learning environments, whether formal, informal or non-formal in nature, remain safely open;

12. Encourages the Member States, in cases where special measures are absolutely necessary, to consult with health and safety professionals, schools, teachers, youth organisations and youth welfare services, as well as parents, in order to adequately take into account the needs of different age groups, vulnerable groups and young people with specific needs, mobility issues or other disabilities, as well as disadvantaged and marginalised groups, leaving no one behind, and not to apply a one-size-fits-all approach; underlines the importance of ensuring language continuity to enable learners who receive education in regional or minority languages to continue to do so in distance or blended learning settings; calls, as a result, on the Member States to take into account the different characteristics and needs of educational, cultural, youth and sports activities;

13. Highlights the positive role that mentoring played in certain countries during the pandemic in assisting young people in solving issues, thereby promoting their mental health and providing an interpersonal connection that offered a sense of perspective as well as psychological support in times of isolation; invites the Commission to consider supporting and funding such mentoring programmes at European level in order to encourage their development in all Member States;
14. Recognises that the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated already existing inequalities in education by limiting opportunities for many of the most vulnerable children and young people, including those living in impoverished or in rural areas, girls, refugees and people with disabilities; calls for increased efforts to identify and support children, young people and families disproportionately affected by the pandemic, taking into account the cultural and contextual factors that influence them, in order to identify pre-pandemic gaps in mental health service provision and to better adapt public systems; urges the Member States to consider the impact of COVID-19 through a gender lens and to ensure the continuation of sexual and reproductive education in all circumstances;

15. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to pay special attention to children and young people who are particularly vulnerable, such as LGBTQ+ youth, racialised children and young people, and those with pre-existing mental health needs;

16. Highlights the important role that a healthy and balanced diet plays in the mental health of children and young people; insists, therefore, on the important social support that schools provide, such as balanced daily meals, which some children do not otherwise receive at home; calls on the Member States to implement Child Guarantee Recommendation 4 asking, among other things, for free access to at least one healthy meal each school day;

17. Insists on the need to increase the funding and adequately promote the opportunities offered by programmes such as Erasmus+, Creative Europe and the European Solidarity Corps, to enhance mobility experiences which contribute to the development of useful and necessary social skills for the future personal and professional growth of the younger generations, and increase their accessibility for all; in this context, calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote vocational training and to make the programmes resilient to possible future mobility limitations, as well as to improve the systematic sharing of projects’ outcomes in order to increase their visibility, upscaling and long-term impact; calls on the Commission to increase the funding of these Union programmes in the next revision of the multiannual financial framework;

18. Expresses its concern that the effects of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) on children and young people might be limited in many cases and may not produce results or structural reforms that would allow children and young people to access quality education or mitigate the negative impact of COVID-related closures of cultural venues and access to cultural creators on young performers in particular, who were denied the opportunity to commence and develop their careers at the crucial early stage; calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure proper funding and fair contractual and working conditions for all young authors, performers, artists and all other cultural creators, workers and professionals working in the cultural and creative sectors, including on social media, who were adversely affected as a result of the pandemic, to step up their overall efforts to support emerging artists and cultural professionals, to promote youth and social entrepreneurship, and to stipulate this goal in a dedicated section on young artists in a European Status of the Artist; reiterates its recommendation that 10 % of national recovery and resilience plans go to education and 2 % to the cultural and creative sector; calls for an in-depth evaluation by the Commission of the projects and reforms related to education, young people and the cultural and creative sectors implemented by Member States from the RRF, and reiterates the need for more
emphasis on these topics within the national reports drafted within the European Semester evaluation;

19. Draws attention to the importance of mobility experiences and the exchange of good practices among teachers, educators, professors, trainers, volunteers and professionals in youth work and youth organisations, cultural creators and sports coaches in broadening their knowledge in youth outreach and strengthening the international and multilingual dimensions, particularly in view of the European Education Area to be achieved by 2025;

20. Calls for a holistic understanding of health that includes overall physical, mental and social well-being and requires comprehensive prevention and healing strategies, including cultural and sporting activities, and promoting the development of creative and social skills;

21. Emphasises the need to promote the design and provision of targeted, intergenerational services that combine the experience of older people with the courage of younger people in a mutually beneficial situation;

22. Underlines the fundamental importance of culture for the development of the individual identity of children and young people, as well as for their education, including their understanding of society, and for their overall well-being;

23. Highlights the urgent need to create an inclusive, creative, dynamic and healthy learning environment from an early age in order to reduce the risk of psychophysical disorders in adulthood; urges the Member States, in this context, to ensure the inclusion and upscaling of all forms of artistic expression, i.e. music, theatre, cinema, documentary, animation, the visual arts, dance and new experimental art forms, in school curricula and as extracurricular artistic and sports activities, thereby stimulating free expression and creativity, and allowing students to participate actively and explore their talents; underlines that art can be an ideal component for interdisciplinary projects and can promote critical thinking and therefore should not be limited to art classes;

24. Urges the Member States and public authorities to develop sports infrastructure and to comprehensively increase the amount of physical education and extracurricular physical activities in schools, including activities addressed to children and young people with disabilities; underlines that sport, like art, can be a strong vehicle of inclusion for children at risk of exclusion; recalls that arts and sports in school curricula may strongly help combat global challenges for youth and education, including learning difficulties and learning disorders, as well as bullying, hate speech and the consumption of psychotropic substances;

25. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to support and adequately fund small local cultural initiatives, sports clubs, leisure facilities, youth organisations and youth welfare institutions to carry out the leisure, non-formal and informal learning activities that play an essential role in the development and well-being of young people and their families, by providing material and psychological support resources, including for young people with fewer opportunities or facing discrimination; underlines the fact that in disadvantaged, rural and remote areas such activities constitute the only opportunity for children and young people to socialise, increase their sense of citizenship and maintain a good level of mental health;
26. Calls for support for grassroots sports and extracurricular activities, as they have suffered disproportionately from the devastating consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic; underlines that amateur sports are the basis for sports at professional level and contribute to both personal development and well-being, as well as to the regional development of rural areas; underlines the importance of keeping open and supporting the recovery of professional sports clubs and sports organisations, as well as supporting athletes; calls on the Commission to support these clubs and organisations adequately, as they play a vital role in the well-being and socialisation of young people;

27. Calls for more coordination at European level between Member States, regional authorities and local representatives of sports teams and clubs, cultural associations, youth and student organisations, educational and university bodies, social partners involved in education, and the private sector in order to strengthen dialogue and cooperation and create a dynamic, multi-level social network that can respond and adapt to future challenges;

28. Calls on the Commission to take action to ensure that the EU as a whole becomes stronger and more self-reliant, leaving no one behind; points out that it must address the wide geographical, gender, social, age and other structural gaps aggravated by the lack of digital infrastructure, connectivity and digital tools across all of the Member States, particularly in rural, remote, island and mountainous areas, as well as in hotspots or other areas that are socio-economically disadvantaged; calls on the Commission to widen the scope and strengthen independent EU and EU-financed not-for-profit educational platforms which comply with EU data privacy standards, such as eTwinning, EPALE, Erasmus+ and the School Education Gateway, so that EU state schools, teachers, trainers and educators can be at the heart of the digital education process without depending on profit-generating platforms; in addition, draws attention to the need to take into account the possible needs of those areas in the event of future pandemics or any other unprecedented situations;

29. Underlines that efforts should be undertaken to generalise digital literacy at all levels of society, enabling the proper use of digital tools and infrastructures; calls, therefore, on the Member States to include digital literacy in the curricula of all learning institutions and to provide the necessary training and equipment for teachers and educators; stresses that particular emphasis should be placed on those who are digitally excluded; draws attention to the difficult situation of learners from families with many children and of parents who are teachers by profession, for whom the obligation to work, teach and learn remotely involves a costly and often unaffordable outlay in order to purchase, from their modest private resources, further equipment in order to meet the requirements of learning and/or working remotely;

30. Underlines that digital technologies harbour substantial potential for teachers, trainers, educators and learners in terms of accessible, open, social and personalised technologies that can bring about more inclusive learning pathways; believes that the smart use of digital technologies, driven by innovative teaching methods and which empower learners, can equip citizens with core competencies for life; points out, however, that a lack of supervision of the digital learning of young people, especially those in disadvantaged and remote environments, can lead to a higher risk of addiction and mental health disorders;
31. Urges the Member States to invest in specific policies, also in the framework of the RRF, that respond to local needs in order (i) to close all existing gaps, including gender, economic, technological and social regional inequalities; (ii) to ensure that educational and vocational training institutions, youth organisations and structures, as well as learners and young people more generally, obtain sufficient financial support, with a special emphasis on the most vulnerable learners who are falling behind and need additional support in order to achieve the expected learning goals, and the schools serving high-poverty and high-minority populations; (iii) to make sure the necessary technologies, innovations, learning support facilities and tools, including digital tools, are in place to consolidate, further develop and deliver quality education and training, as well as informal and non-formal learning opportunities to all; and (iv) to support cultural initiatives bringing children and young people together in the framework of the cultural recovery of local communities;

32. Highlights that pre-existing gender norms and expectations can be important factors adversely affecting mental and physical health, as well as education opportunities; points out that developing the capacities of educators through adequate resources and support is critical in order to better identify and address the gendered repercussions of education, culture and sports closures on the broader health and well-being of children and young people; calls on the Member States to promote resilient, equitable and gender-responsive education systems which ensure that gender-specific needs are met, such as comprehensive sexuality education and gender-based violence prevention and response;

33. Reiterates the importance of investing in innovation and research in education, enabling the state education system to have access to a ‘culture of innovation’ across the EU and to ensure that high-quality learning materials, pedagogical approaches and tools are accessible and available free of charge to all; in this context, draws attention to the need for a financial framework that allows for the reimbursable purchase or rental of appropriate digital tools, including computer equipment and access to an efficient internet network;

34. Highlights the need to speed up the digitalisation of cultural and heritage resources, as well as of audiovisual libraries, and to introduce discount schemes allowing universal access to cultural resources, including for marginalised people and peripheral schools which are unable to purchase subscriptions at concessionary rates;

35. Highlights the need to monitor developments in, and the pedagogical, health and safety consequences of, technological and digital advances through cooperation and dialogue with young people directly, as well as with experts, educators, education social partners, and other representatives of civil society; points out the urgent need to review critically the possible dangers of digital advances and their unpredictable consequences, bearing in mind that their primary purpose is to serve people’s needs;

36. Urges the Member States to promote science and research on young people’s mental health and to assess the long-term impact of closures, particularly of prolonged remote learning, isolation and uncertainty, on knowledge acquisition, neurological development and socio-emotional skills, and to develop targeted measures to support those most affected in order to combat and prevent long-term mental health problems; calls on the Commission and the Member States to systematically collect and compare research
findings, experience and knowledge in dealing with mental health issues among young people in the EU; further calls on the Commission to facilitate the exchange of good practices and mutual learning between Member States on these matters;

37. Calls on the Commission to raise awareness among young people of the benefits and risks associated with digital technology, ensuring not only their access to technological tools, but also their ability to use them safely and properly, so that they serve as valuable instruments for socialisation and democracy;

38. Underlines that prolonged periods spent in the digital environment can have far-reaching mental health and safety impacts on children and young people, such as screen fatigue or internet addiction, and also exposure to online violence and harassment, as well as to fake news, which can lead not only to depression, anxiety and social exclusion, but also to suicides among young people; calls on the Commission to promote greater collaborative and systematic prevention efforts aimed at protecting young people from such harm;

39. Calls on the Commission to designate a European Year of Mental Health and to develop a European plan for the protection of mental health in education, vocational training, and informal and non-formal learning; is of the opinion that any such plan should build on the findings of the Working Group of the European Education Area Strategic Framework and provide comprehensive guidelines, propose examples of good practice and create incentives for Member States to put in place dedicated actions and training modules, thereby equipping teachers, trainers, educators, youth workers and employers with the necessary skill set to recognise early signs of burnout, stress and psychological stress in learners, young people and young interns, or young people on vocational training, with a view to activating targeted prevention measures;

40. Believes that the plan should promote free and regular psychological support for teachers, educators and childcare professionals, and should also devote special attention to marginalised and disadvantaged groups and persons with disabilities in order to take their specific needs into account and ensure that they have equal access to all activities and opportunities; underlines that the plan should also encourage the intensification of the links between educational institutions and cultural, youth and sports organisations to provide extracurricular activities rooted in the wider community, with the aim of reinforcing learners’ sense of belonging, promoting young people’s agency and increasing their social commitment;

41. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to follow the recommendations of the Conference on the Future of Europe on minimising the impact of a serious crisis on young people and on their mental health, and also to take into account future generations in all their recommendations and proposals;

42. Calls on the Commission to continue developing mitigating measures with regard to the negative consequences of COVID-19 closures on children and young people throughout 2023, and to make use of this year to propose a robust legacy of the European Year of Youth 2022 for the future;

43. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, Europe's youth faces a mental health crisis. While about 10-20 percent of children and young people faced mental health problems before the pandemic, this figure has risen to 20-25 per cent in the last two years, according to experts.

This estimate however is expected to fall short in assessing the full scale of the problem, as in praxis, it is very difficult to assess mental illnesses among young people.

Young generations have missed opportunities for exchange, human professional enrichment, and the chance to be an active part of the European society. Constant changes in national regulations, as well as cross-sectoral issues relating to economy, employment and lifestyle factors, have resulted in a situation of uncertainty that has undermined their ability to make long-term plans, as well as to build institutional trust.

Some groups faced increased exposure to mental health risks. For young women, the LGBTIQ+ community, people with migration backgrounds, and people with generally low access to resources, the pressure of socio-economic disadvantages and income equalities increased the incidence and risk of developing mental health disorders.

This development gives cause for substantial socio-economic concerns. Already in 2018, a Health at a Glance Europe report estimated the economic costs resulting from mental health disorders to be 4 % of total GDP in the EU. As the likelihood of the development of mental health disorders as an adult is drastically increased when suffering from mental health problems at a young age, this poses dire implications for Europe's future.

Technological development has opened new pathways for more dynamic and creative ways of addressing work and education. However, the development of some social skills is heavily reliant on face-to-face experiences and peer-to-peer interactions. Therefore, while online education shows great potential as a supplement to traditional forms of education, it must not develop into a full substitute for in-person learning.

Moreover, the relocation of education to the digital environment has further emphasised inequalities in marginalised groups, who lack adequate access to technology, as well as regional differences between urban and rural areas.

For all the above reasons, this report seeks to put forward concrete proposals and recommendations to deal with the effects of Covid-19 related closures of educational, cultural, youth, and sports facilities on children and young people in the EU. The Rapporteur presents possible actions across seven thematic strands detailed below.

**First**, adequate funding and the promotion of opportunities offered by programs such as Erasmus+, Creative Europe and the European Solidarity Corps are key to enhancing mobility experiences and increasing their accessibility for all, regardless of income, gender, health, and region of origin. To this end, the Rapporteur calls on the commission and the Member States to improve the systematic sharing of project outcomes to enhance visibility, upscaling, and long-term impact.
Furthermore, the Rapporteur recognises that mobility experiences and exchanges of good practices among professors, teachers, educators, trainers, youth workers, and sports coaches carry great importance in strengthening the international and multilingual dimension of the 2025 European Education Area.

Second, schools, early childhood, and care institutions play an elemental role in providing necessary material and psychological support to children and their families. The Rapporteur, therefore, calls on the Member States to provide sufficient financial support to mainstream education institutions to ensure the support of pedagogical and psychological development of learners.

As such, the Rapporteur incentivises Member States to improve and develop health and safety frameworks in learning environments to provide learners and teachers the support, specialised psychologists and special educational needs support staff who can contribute to transforming the classroom into a welcoming and attractive place in which to grow, learn, debate and overcome differences constructively.

To this end, the Rapporteur underlines the importance of in-person learning for personal development. In future pandemics or other unprecedented situations, Member States are called for, to keep all learning environments, be they formal, informal, or non-formal structures, open.

Should special measures become necessary, the Rapporteur calls for the Member States to take the needs of different age groups into account and not to apply an one-size-fits-all solution.

Third, the Rapporteur highlights the need for a holistic understanding of health that aims for complete physical, mental and social well-being and to this end recognises the need for comprehensive, preventive, and healing strategies including cultural and sporting activities and promoting the development of creative and social abilities.

The Rapporteur insists on the inclusion of art, music, and culture in school curricula, as well as the promotion of sporting activities in schools to stimulate an inclusive, creative, dynamic, and healthy learning environment from an early age and to reduce the risk of psychophysical illness in adulthood.

Fourth, the Rapporteur acknowledges the need for support and funding of small local cultural and sports organizations to allow them to pursue leisure and informal-learning activities, which play an essential role in the formation and well-being of young people and their families, as they provide material and psychological support resources also for those with fewer economic opportunities.

Fifth, the Rapporteur stresses the need for more coordination between the Member States and local representatives of sports and cultural associations, youth organisations, educational and university bodies, and the private sector. This shall facilitate the strengthening of dialogue and cooperation and create a dynamic, multi-level social network that can respond and bounce back to future challenges.

Sixth, for the EU to become stronger and self-reliant as a whole, leaving no one behind, it needs to address the wider structural gaps caused by the lack of digital infrastructure and tools in rural and peripheral areas. The Rapporteur, therefore, urges the Member States to invest in
specific policies that respond to local needs to bridge regional gaps and ensure financial support so that the technology, innovation, learning and support facilities and tools required to continue education and training are available and accessible to all.

**Seventh,** the Rapporteur highlights the importance of investing in innovation and research in education, for enabling the public educational system to have access to a “culture of innovation” across the EU and for ensuring that high-quality learning material, pedagogical approaches, and tools are accessible to all.

Recognising the need to monitor developments and consequences of technological and digital advances, through cooperation and dialogue with experts, educators, and representatives of civil society, the Rapporteur further calls on the Commission to promote awareness of the benefits and risks associated with the use of digital technology by young people. Not only their access to technological tools but also the ability to use them safely and properly so that they may serve as valuable instruments for socialisation and democracy to reduce online violence harassment and fake news must be ensured.

**To conclude,** the Rapporteur believes that the issue of mental health in children and young people poses a key challenge to the European Union. The mental health impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the connected closures of educational, cultural, youth, and sports facilities on children and young people, have the potential to impose long-lasting negative effects on the European social-, health-, and economic system.

The Rapporteur urges to draw valuable insights from the lessons learned during the Covid-19 pandemic and points toward the opportunity to, under the banner of the European Year of Youth, make substantial improvements to mental health issues that have previously been ignored. The end of the pandemic should be regarded as an opportunity to address the weaknesses that the virus exacerbated, but which have always been present in European society.

The proposals put forward in this report, emphasise the need for multi-faced and holistic European action, to promote mental health in children and young people. To this end, the Rapporteur puts his focus on the introduction of cross-sectoral preventive measures instead of seeking to provide more accessible therapeutic treatment only.

Furthermore, the Rapporteur recognises that both well-being and mental health are inextricably linked to culture and physical health. As such, the Rapporteur highlights the key role of educational, cultural, youth, and sports facilities in ensuring the positive development of mental health in children and young people and therefore calls for these venues to remain accessible during future pandemics or unrepresented crises.

While the Rapporteur acknowledges that the digital transition in education poses many potential benefits, he stresses that remote learning must only serve as a supplement to traditional forms of in-person education, not substitute it.

Lastly, the Rapporteur emphasises the fact that marginalised and disadvantaged groups suffered disproportionately under the pandemic. Therefore, the Rapporteur recognises the need for a holistic approach that makes daily life increasingly fair and equal for societies, to achieve better mental health.
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| Result of final vote | + : 25  
- : 1  
0 : 3 |
| Members present for the final vote | Asim Ademov, Christine Anderson, Andrea Bocskor, Ilana Cicurel, Tomasz Frankowski, Romeo Franz, Sylvie Guillaume, Hannes Heide, Niyazi Kizilyürek, Predrag Fred Matić, Dace Melbārde, Victor Negrescu, Niklas Nienåß, Diana Riba i Giner, Marcos Ros Sempere, Monica Semedo, Andrey Slabakov, Massimiliano Smeriglio, Michaela Šojdrová, Sabine Verheyen, Theodoros Zagorakis, Milan Zver |
| Substitutes present for the final vote | Isabella Adinolfi, Pernando Barrena Arza, Vlad-Marius Botoș, Morten Løkkegaard, Alessandro Panza, Iuliu Winkler |
| Substitutes under Rule 209(7) present for the final vote | Katarina Barley |
## FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

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Key:

- + : in favour
- - : against
- 0 : abstentions