



2022/2004(INI)

25.4.2022

DRAFT 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

	Page
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION.....	3
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT	9

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 the European Youth Event 2021 report entitled ‘Youth Ideas Report for the Conference on the Future of Europe’,
- 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 (COM(2021)0770) and to the accompanying staff working document

¹ [OJ C 316, 6.8.2021, p. 2.](#)

² [OJ C 395, 29.9.2021, p. 101.](#)

³ OJ C 465, 17.11.2021, p. 82.

⁴ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2022)0045.

⁵ [OJ C 15, 12.1.2022, p. 184.](#)

⁶ [OJ L 462, 28.12.2021, p. 1.](#)

(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 Inclusion ⁷,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 30 September 2020 entitled ‘Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027: Resetting education and training for the digital age’ (COM(2020)0624),
- 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 pupil perspective’¹²,
- having regard to the NESET Ad hoc report no. 2/2021 entitled ‘The impact of COVID-19 on student learning outcomes across Europe: the challenges of distance education for all’¹³,
- 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

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/social/vocational-skills-week/covid-19-how-can-vet-respond_en

⁸ https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-09/coronavirus-mobility-impact-results-may2020_en.pdf

⁹ Study – ‘Education and Youth in post-COVID-19 Europe – crisis effects and policy recommendations’, European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, Policy Department B – Structural and Cohesion Policies, 4 May 2021.

¹⁰ Study – ‘Youth in Europe: Effects of COVID-19 on their economic and social situation’, European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, Policy Department A – Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies, 24 September 2021.

¹¹ Study – ‘Cultural and creative sectors in post-COVID-19 Europe: Crisis effects and policy recommendations’, European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, Policy Department B – Structural and Cohesion Policies, 18 February 2021.

¹² Diez-Palomar, J., Pulido, C. and Villarejo, B., ‘Distance learning from a student perspective’, NESET Ad hoc report no. 3/2021.

¹³ Sternadel, D., ‘The impact of COVID-19 on student learning outcomes across Europe: the challenges of distance education for all’, NESET Ad hoc report no. 2/2021.

disadvantaged children and the socio-economic consequences thereof¹⁴,

- 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 UNICEF report of 4 October 2021 entitled ‘The State of the World’s Children 2021: On My Mind: promoting, protecting and caring for children’s mental health’¹⁷,
- 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

¹⁴ Koehler, C., Psacharopoulos, G. and Van der Graaf, L., ‘The impact of COVID-19 on the education of disadvantaged children and the socio-economic consequences thereof’, NESET-EENEE report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022.

¹⁵ Di Pietro, G., Biagi, F., Costa, P., Karpiński, Z. and Mazza, J., ‘The likely impact of COVID-19 on education: Reflections based on the existing literature and recent international datasets’, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020.

¹⁶ Moxon, D., Bacaiso, C. and Şerban, A., ‘Beyond the pandemic: The impact of COVID-19 on young people in Europe, European Youth Forum, Brussels, 2022,
<https://www.youthforum.org/files/European20Youth20Forum20Report20v1.2.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/impact-covid-19-poor-mental-health-children-and-young-people-tip-iceberg>

¹⁸ Takino, S., Hewlett, E., Nishina, Y. and Prinz, C., ‘Supporting young people’s mental health through the COVID-19 crisis’, OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19), 2021.

¹⁹ <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/about-us/reports-and-impact/coronavirus-impact-on-young-people-with-mental-health-needs/#main-content>

²⁰ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/779318/results>

²¹ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/MHF%20Scotland%20Impacts%20of%20Lockdown.pdf>

²² <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2021/impact-of-covid-19-on-young-people-in-the-eu>

Work Mobility’²³,

- having regard to its resolution of 23 November 2021 on EU sports policy: assessment and possible ways forward²⁴,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education (A9-0000/2022),
- A. whereas the closure of schools, spaces for culture and extracurricular activities and sports facilities has denied children and young people the opportunity to participate in activities which are essential for their overall development, their intellectual, physical and mental well-being, and for their social and professional inclusion;
- B. 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 levels²⁵, leading pundits to call this the ‘silent pandemic’ or the ‘pandemic scar’;
- C. 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;
- D. whereas it has been observed that 64 % of young people in the 18-34 age group were at risk of depression in spring 2021²⁶ and that suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people²⁷ as a result of loneliness, isolation and the lack of educational, employment and financial prospects; whereas children and young people with fewer opportunities or from marginalised groups and socially disadvantaged backgrounds have been hit harder by the COVID-19 pandemic, mostly owing to structural inequalities;
- E. 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 disorders²⁸;
- F. 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 and professional development and quality of life;
- G. 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;

²³ <https://you.wemove.eu/campaigns/responding-to-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-international-youth-work-mobility>

²⁴ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2021)0463.

²⁵ https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/1e1ecb53-en/1/2/2/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/1e1ecb53-en&_csp_=c628cf9bcf7362d2dc28c912508045f6&itemIGO=oe&itemContentType=book

²⁶ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1287356/risk-of-depression-in-europe-2021-by-age>

²⁷ UNICEF article ‘The Mental Health Burden Affecting Europe’s Children’ (4 October 2021).

²⁸ European Parliament Flash Eurobarometer: Women in times of COVID-19 (<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2712>).

- H. whereas any EU mental health strategy aimed at children and young people must involve their parents and families, youth organisations, youth workers, cultural institutions and sports clubs, in order to facilitate a holistic approach and ensure outreach to marginalised groups;
- I. whereas scientific data suggests that levels of institutional trust among members of the younger generations have fallen as a result of the way the pandemic has been handled; whereas special attention needs to be devoted to regaining that trust;
- J. whereas the pandemic should be regarded as an opportunity to address long-standing mental health-related issues that have previously been ignored;
- K. whereas the war in Ukraine and the resulting uncertainties are expected to have a further negative impact on the mental health of children and young people;
- L. 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 in providing the necessary material and psychological support for children and their families, and calls on the Member States to provide sufficient financial support to mainstream education institutions in order to ensure that both the pedagogical and the psychological development of learners is increasingly promoted;
 2. 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 and teachers with the support of specialist psychologists and special educational needs support staff who can contribute to making the classroom a welcoming and attractive place in which to grow, learn, discuss and overcome differences constructively;
 3. Underlines the vital importance of interpersonal relationships among children and young people; calls, therefore, on the Member States, in the event of future pandemics or other unprecedented situations, to keep all learning environments, whether formal, informal or non-formal in nature, open; calls on the Member States, in cases where special measures are absolutely necessary, to take into account the needs of different age groups and not to apply a one-size-fits-all approach;
 4. Insists on the need to adequately fund and promote the opportunities offered by programmes such as Erasmus+, Creative Europe and the European Solidarity Corps, to enhance mobility experiences and increase their accessibility for all, regardless of income, gender, health status and region of origin; calls on the Commission and the Member States to improve the systematic sharing of projects' outcomes in order to increase their visibility, upscaling and long-term impact;
 5. Draws attention to the importance of mobility experiences and the exchange of good practices among teachers, educators, professors, trainers, youth workers, 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;
 6. 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;

7. Urges the Member States, in this context, to ensure the inclusion of art, music and culture in school curricula, as well as the promotion of sports activities in schools, in order to create an inclusive, creative, dynamic and healthy learning environment from an early age and to reduce the risk of psychophysical disorders in adulthood;
8. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to support and adequately fund small local cultural initiatives, sports clubs and leisure facilities to carry out the leisure 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 those with fewer economic opportunities;
9. Calls for more coordination at European level between Member States, regional authorities and local representatives of sports and cultural associations, youth organisations, educational and university bodies 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;
10. 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 wider structural gaps caused by the lack of digital infrastructure and digital tools in rural and peripheral areas;
11. Urges the Member States to invest in specific policies that respond to local needs in order to close regional gaps and ensure financial support so that the technologies, innovations, learning and support facilities and tools required to continue education and training are available and accessible to all;
12. 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 to all;
13. Highlights the need to monitor developments in, and the consequences of, technological and digital advances through cooperation and dialogue with experts, educators and representatives of civil society;
14. 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 in order to reduce online violence, harassment and fake news;
15. 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 inequalities 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.

Forth, 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.