

Intergenerational Justice Review

Issue topic:

Generation Corona: The current and future
impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
on the young generation

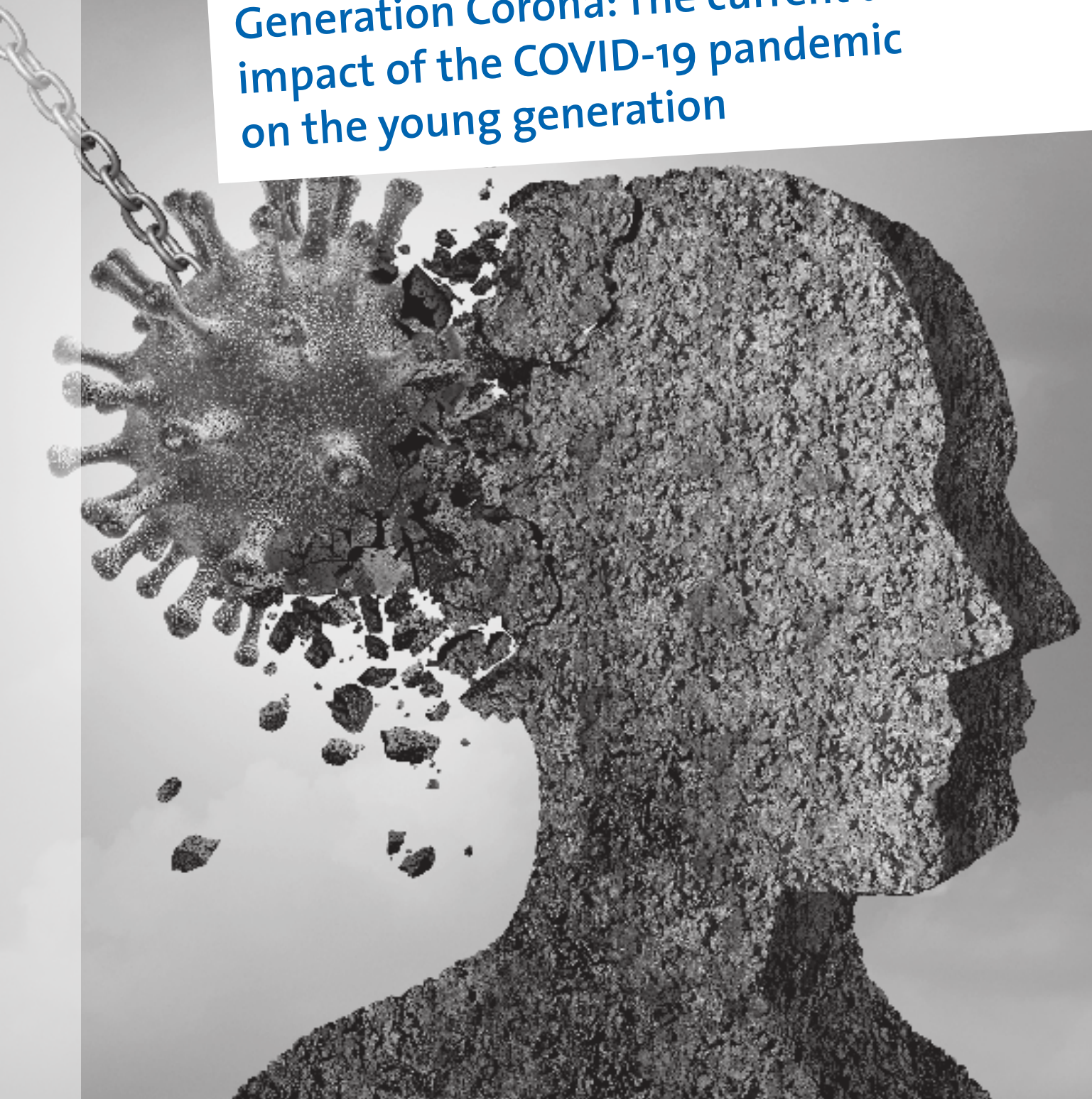


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Chief Editor

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The peer-reviewed journal *Intergenerational Justice Review* (IGJR) aims to improve our understanding of intergenerational justice and sustainable development through pure and applied research. The IGJR (ISSN 2190-6335) is an open-access journal that is published on a professional level with an extensive international readership. The editorial board comprises over 50 international experts from ten countries, representing eight disciplines. Published contributions do not reflect the opinions of the Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations (FRFG) or the Intergenerational Foundation (IF). Citations from articles are permitted upon accurate quotation and submission of one sample of the incorporated citation to FRFG or IF. All other rights are reserved.

The COVID-19 pandemic has influenced many aspects of everyday life of all generations and of young people in particular. Even though kindergartens, schools and universities did their utmost to react swiftly to the radically and rapidly shifting situation, the young generation may well have been the one suffering the most from the consequences of the pandemic. This generation is now sometimes called the “Generation Corona”. The term is mainly used by the media as well as in academia, especially in sociology and psychology.

The negative effects of the pandemic hit the young generation in many aspects of daily life, but this issue focuses on two areas in particular: education and mental health. In terms of education, many countries of the world already had their own share of problems well before the coronavirus outbreak. This picture turned even worse once the impacts of the pandemic made themselves felt – when school closings, distance learning and other forms of reduced lessons became the “new normal”. Especially young people in vulnerable circumstances suffered from school closures. For underprivileged families, especially those with a migration background, who live with several siblings in cramped conditions with a poor technical infrastructure and where German is hardly spoken at home, this exceptional distance learning situation caused further problems down the line and increased stress for children and parents alike.

Furthermore, the pandemic had a disastrous impact on the mental health of young people, an oftentimes invisible cost. Due to the lockdowns and contact restrictions, they suffered from low social participation, meaning that they felt increasingly lonely and socially isolated. The restrictions to slow down the spread of the virus were damaging to the maintenance of friendships and other social relationships. Visits to country school homes, sports excursions and language exchanges, which are normally highlights of a school’s life, did not take place (and cannot be made up for). The cancellation of physical exercise hours, normally a part of the school curriculum, led to a deterioration of the physical state of young persons. Studies show that computer games and television consumption increased sharply during homeschooling phases. This affected especially socially weaker children in families in which both parents had to work.

IGJR 2/2021 is a special issue that focuses on a specific development of the COVID-19 pandemic, namely its impact on the young generation. This is done through two republished articles and two book reviews, each of which add their own voice and perspective to this ever-unfolding topic. The regular reader of this journal might wonder why this issue of IGJR has a different structure than usual. It was compiled by two interns of the FRFG, Noah Croitoru and William Clark, who read countless articles on the topic of this issue and who can themselves attest to a strong sense of belonging to the Generation Corona. Thus, two young voices participated in the editors’ decision which articles were republished.

The first article, written by Clara Albrecht, Vera Freundl, Lavinia Kinne and Tanja Stitteneder, discusses how COVID-19 has

caused severe economic, social and health disruptions among young people worldwide. Schoolchildren and students faced learning losses as time spent on school activities dropped by about a half. Likewise, apprentices and young adults in vocational training experienced learning losses due to school closures and reduced in-person training time. With declining enrolment rates in high school and college, the pandemic caused a major and unprecedented disruption in (higher) education. In many OECD countries, youth unemployment increased sharply, especially at the beginning of the pandemic. In addition, the mental health of the younger population deteriorated. The article concludes with a plea to learn from these negative consequences for a large part of the population and to ensure that in the future, no one is left behind in times of crisis.

The second article, authored by Miriam Allam, Moritz Ader and Gamze Igrioglu, focuses on how young people have been experiencing the government action against the pandemic and what they propose for the recovery strategy. A sample of 151 youth organisations from 72 countries was surveyed in July-August 2021. The study shows that the predominant concerns of the youth revolve around mental health, education and employment. The article also delves into a number of issues centred around the “disconnect” with democracy amongst today’s youth. A variety of causes and explanations are brought forth as to why this might be so, such as a lack of youth representation and inadequate support for vulnerable groups. The authors conclude with an account of what would be necessary to promote an increase in government trust for OECD survey respondents.

There follow two book reviews. Lutz Finkeldey reviews the German anthology *Generation Corona? Wie Jugendliche durch die Pandemie benachteiligt werden* (engl. translation: *Generation Corona? How young people are disadvantaged by the pandemic*), edited by Dieter Dohmen & Klaus Hurrelmann in 2021. The 15 chapters by a total of 51 authors are centred around the question whether the term “Generation Corona” is adequate.

In Konrad Goldenbaum’s and William Clark’s review of Steven Taylor’s *The Psychology of Pandemics*, a book that was written before the pandemic, it is argued that the unique distance of this book to everyday pandemic politics presents a crisp unpoliticised view on communication and psychology during a pandemic.

This issue concludes with a report on the Berlin Demography Days 2022. The conference is a forum for exchange and debate in population sciences. Under this year’s motto „Youth in Demographic Change“, questions of intergenerational and intragenerational justice were discussed. The contributions painted a consolidated and holistic picture of the effects the COVID-19 pandemic had on young people in Europe and the world.

Jörg Tremmel, Chief Editor

Markus Rutsche, Book Review Editor

Noah Croitoru, Co-Editor

William Clark, Co-Editor

“Corona class of 2020”: a lost generation?¹

by Clara Albrecht, Vera Freundl, Lavinia Kinne and Tanja Stitteneder

Abstract: The coronavirus crisis has caused severe economic, social and health disruptions worldwide. Children and young adults were among those who suffered most from the effects of the pandemic. Schoolchildren and students faced learning losses, and time spent on school activities dropped by about one-half. Likewise, apprentices and young adults in vocational training experienced learning losses due to school closures and reduced in-person training time. With declining enrolment rates in high school and college, the pandemic caused a major and unprecedented disruption in (higher) education. In many OECD countries, youth unemployment increased sharply, especially at the beginning of the pandemic. In addition to all that, mental health deteriorated within the younger population. This shows us how important it is to learn from these negative consequences for a large part of the population and to ensure in the future that no one is left behind in times of crisis.

Keywords: Coronavirus, School, Education, Learning loss, Youth unemployment, Job losses, Mental health

Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic has caused unprecedented disruptions in virtually all aspects of people's lives. In addition to the severe health consequences individuals themselves or their relatives have encountered, many have suddenly found themselves in worse economic conditions. Furthermore, social isolation will probably have lasting impacts on people's mental health as well as on their social interactions. While the pandemic has inarguably hit individuals of all ages, it is likely that children and adolescents have been affected the most severely. School, puberty and further education or the start of a working career are important phases in an individual's life, accompanied by many uncertainties as well as life-changing experiences. This article aims to shed light on the consequences of the pandemic and its associated economic crisis as well as how it has impacted youth from school age to work entry. It highlights the first evidence on the impact of closed educational institutions on learning at all stages as well as the difficulties encountered when entering the job market or moving on to higher levels of education.

Learning losses during the Covid-19 crisis

The extent of current learning losses

Students are among those particularly affected by Covid-19 because they have to deal with the impacts of the pandemic on a daily basis. In fact, over 90% of school children worldwide (around 1.5 billion children) faced fully or partially closed schools in the first half of 2020. One year into the pandemic, almost half of the world's students are still affected by school closures (UNESCO 2021). The associated dramatic learning losses are documented in many countries. For instance, in Germany, the time children spent with school-related activities in spring 2020 was more than

halved as a consequence of the Covid-19-related school closures (Grewenig et al. 2020). During the second period of closures in early 2021, children still learned three hours less than on a typical school day before the pandemic (Woessmann et al. 2021). Maldonado and de Witte (2020) find that primary school students of the 2020 cohort in Belgium had significantly lower scores in standardized tests compared to previous cohorts – across all tested subjects. Following a study by the UK Department for Education (2021), average learning losses of primary students in England corresponded to 3.7 months in math and 1.8 months in reading by October 2020. In the Netherlands, the school closures in spring 2020 resulted in a loss of student performance in primary school achievement tests as large as 20% – corresponding exactly to what would have been learned during the period in which schools were closed, even though digitalisation in the Netherlands is rather advanced (Engzell et al. 2021). All of these studies find drastically larger reductions in learning time or competencies for disadvantaged students. This also holds true for the US: While the learning progress of children living in high-income areas decreased temporarily at the outbreak of the Covid-19 crisis but soon returned to baseline levels, children in lower-income areas “remained 50% below baseline levels through the end of the school year” (Chetty et al. 2020: 41). Thus, school closures are likely to aggravate educational inequality.

The “Corona class of 2020” could face years of reduced pay and limited job prospects, long after the current economic storm has passed, unless additional support is provided fast.

Kathleen Henahan, Resolution Foundation, on Reuters 2020.

The long-term impacts of learning losses

Unfortunately, datasets comparable to the ones described above are hard to come by on a global scale. The exact effects of the Covid-19-related school closures on student skills and knowledge therefore remain largely unknown. However, Hanushek and Woessmann (2020) suggest that losses in both learning time and student competencies will likely have a life-long impact. Based on existing research, they estimate that the loss of one third of a school year reduces a student's later life-time income by 2.6% on average (3.9% if half a school year is lost). The estimates vary substantially by country: The learning losses associated with one third of a school year range from a 5.6% later income loss in Singapore to 1.5% in Greece. As indicated above, disadvantaged students may be disproportionately affected. However, it is not only the individuals' future earnings perspectives that are affected, but also society at large. Hanushek and Woessmann (2020) estimate that if an entire student cohort misses out on the skills usually learned

during one third of a school year (and later cohorts return to previous learning levels), a country's future GDP may be reduced by 1.5% on average for the remainder of a century (2.2% if half a school year is lost). In this scenario, the total economic losses could amount to several trillions: for instance, in the US, this 1.5% loss in future GDP would correspond to USD 14.2 trillion. Additionally, research on previous school closures in Belgium, Canada, and Argentina shows that lost learning may lead to lower student competences (Baker 2013), increased class repetition and reduced educational attainment even in higher education (Belot/ Webbinck 2010), reduced income and increased unemployment (Jaume/Willén 2019). Hampf et al. (2017) find that higher competences correspond to a higher likelihood to find work, with consistent results across the diverse set of countries in their sample. In line with this, Woessmann (2016) asserts that more years of schooling systematically go with lower unemployment. Finally, unemployment at a young age seems to impact life-long income as well: De Fraja et al. (2017) suggest that one month of unemployment between the ages 18 and 20 causes a life-long income loss of 2%.

Figure 1: Decline in Apprentices Over the Last Decade in Germany

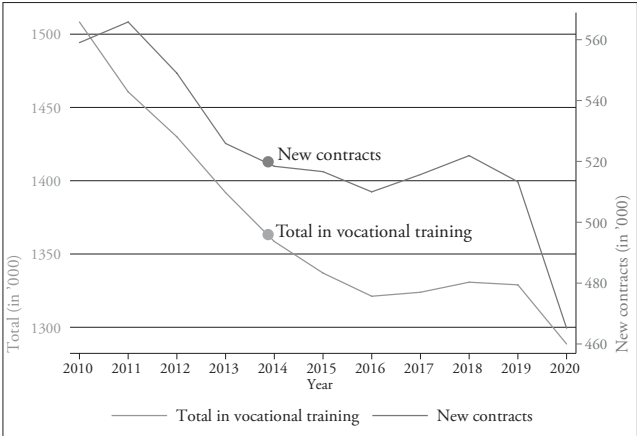
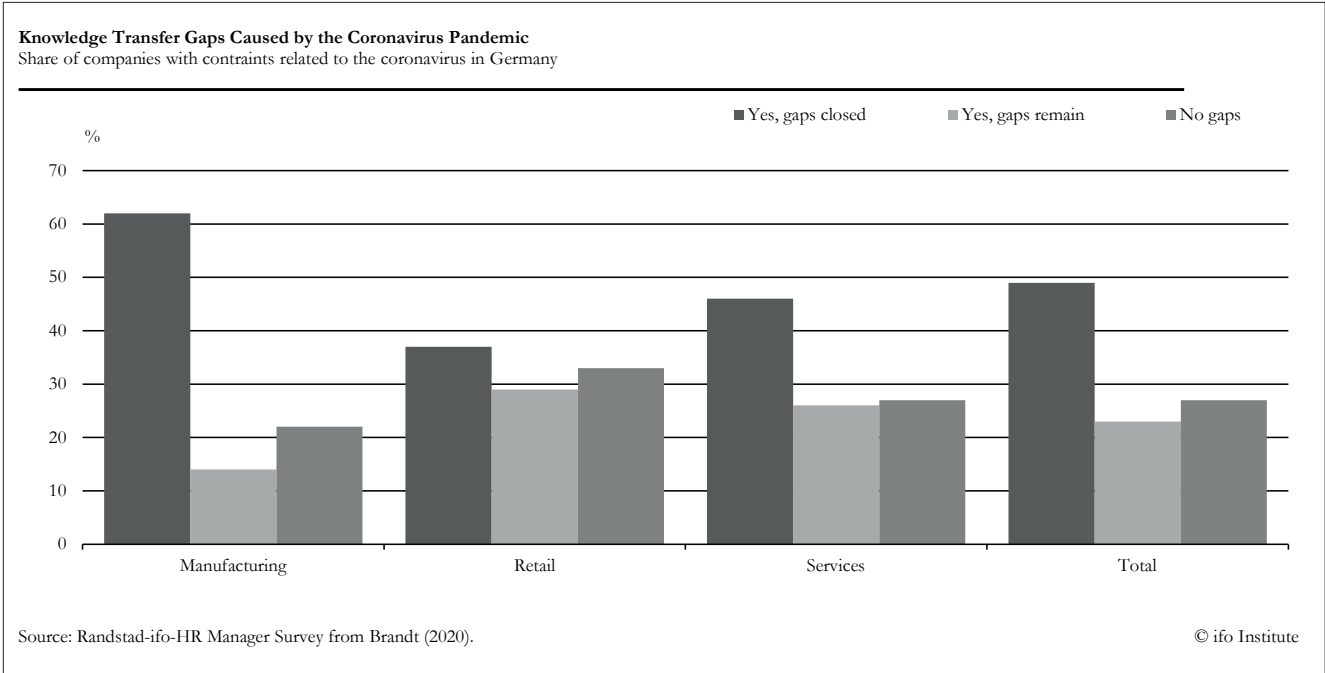


Figure 2



Vocational training during the pandemic

Decline in apprenticeships

Vocational education has been particularly hit by a pandemic that prevents in-person meetings. In many cases, the practical parts taught mostly in firms had to be paused and could hardly be replaced by online formats. In addition, theoretical concepts are taught in schools that, like all other schools, have largely remained closed. Generally, the number of signed apprenticeship contracts reacts to the economic cycle (e.g., Lüthi/Wolter 2020, among others). Using a novel dataset, Goller and Wolter (2021) analyse the behaviour of apprenticeship supply by tracking the search intensity for apprenticeships on an online platform in Switzerland. The authors show a very strong, negative reaction in the search queries during the first shutdown in mid-March 2020. In Germany, around 465,200 people signed an apprenticeship contract in 2020, corresponding to 9.4% fewer concluded contracts than in the previous year. Although the demand for vocational training has been decreasing somewhat steadily in recent years, the current drop is unique in its magnitude (figure 1).

Knowledge gaps due to closed vocational schools and education facilities

Figure 2 shows that students working in companies with operational constraints related to the coronavirus experienced a disruption in knowledge transfer (Brandt 2020). Although the resulting gaps could be closed in most cases, they remained in 23% of the firms. Overall, apprentices in the manufacturing sector had the largest gaps in knowledge transfer, but also the highest share of closed gaps. In contrast, knowledge gaps occurred less frequently in the trade sector. However, these gaps were also closed less often. The extent to which vocational training has been affected varies greatly by industry and region. Working and learning from home may not be feasible for all occupations. For example, apprentices in the hospitality or service sector were more affected than apprentices in other sectors in which virtual solutions could compensate for much of the missed face-to-face training time, such as in the public sector (Biebeler/Schreiber 2020). Thus, the pandemic could exacerbate some of the shortages of skilled workers that already prevailed before the pandemic (ZDF 2021).

In general, neither employers nor the vocational education system were prepared for a crisis of this kind. Although the pandemic accelerated distance learning also in vocational education, and some companies managed to switch to online training to at least some extent, a large learning gap is emerging between countries and societies. An international survey on technical vocational education and training (TVET) shows that low-income countries are particularly affected. Poorer countries could rarely offer distance learning due to the lack of adequate IT infrastructure, equipment, and financial resources, and are at risk of being left behind (International Labour Organization and World Bank 2021).

Higher education in times of Covid-19

Overall, the coronavirus crisis has not led to an increase in drop-out rates from education and training for young adults (18-24 years) within the EU.² On average, the drop-out rate in 2020 even decreased by 0.1% in the EU27 compared to 2019. While in Germany there were slightly more early dropouts than in the previous year (+ 0.7%), Spain continued its trend of falling dropout rates but still ranges far above the average (figure 3).

In contrast to most European countries, college and high-school enrolment in the United States experienced a drastic decrease in

Figure 3

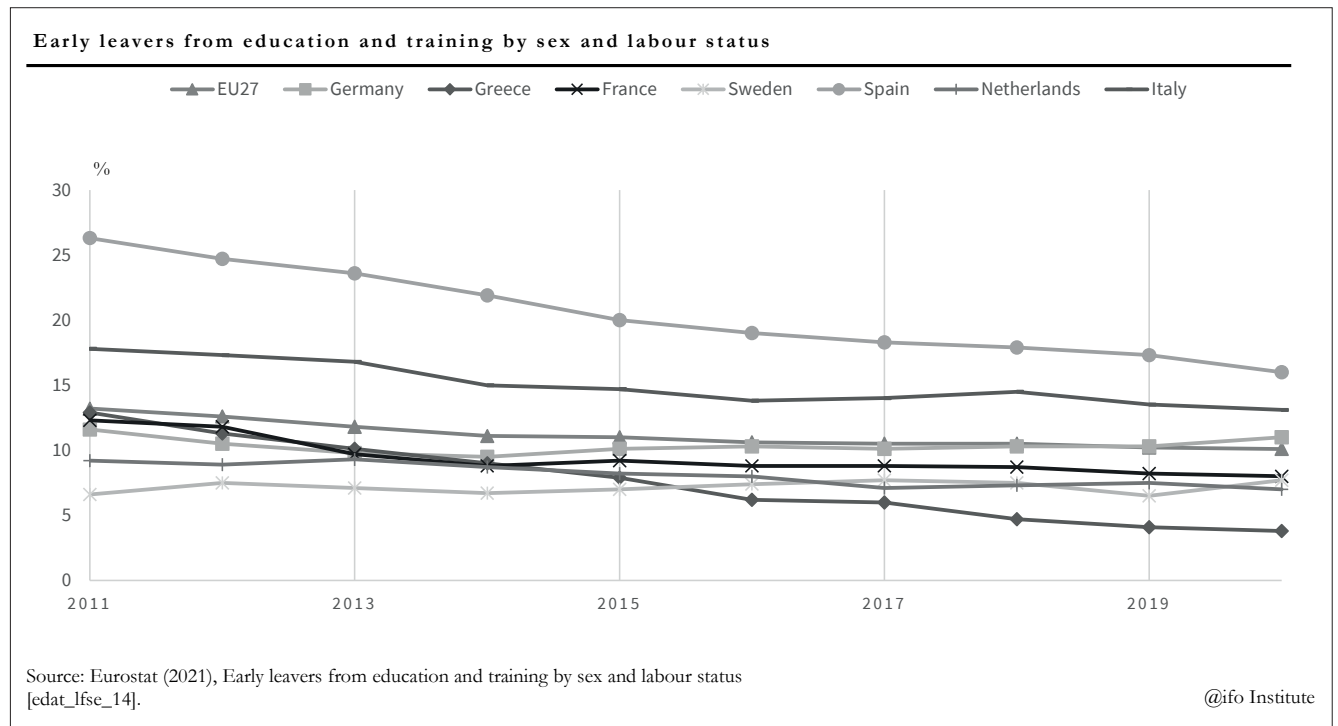
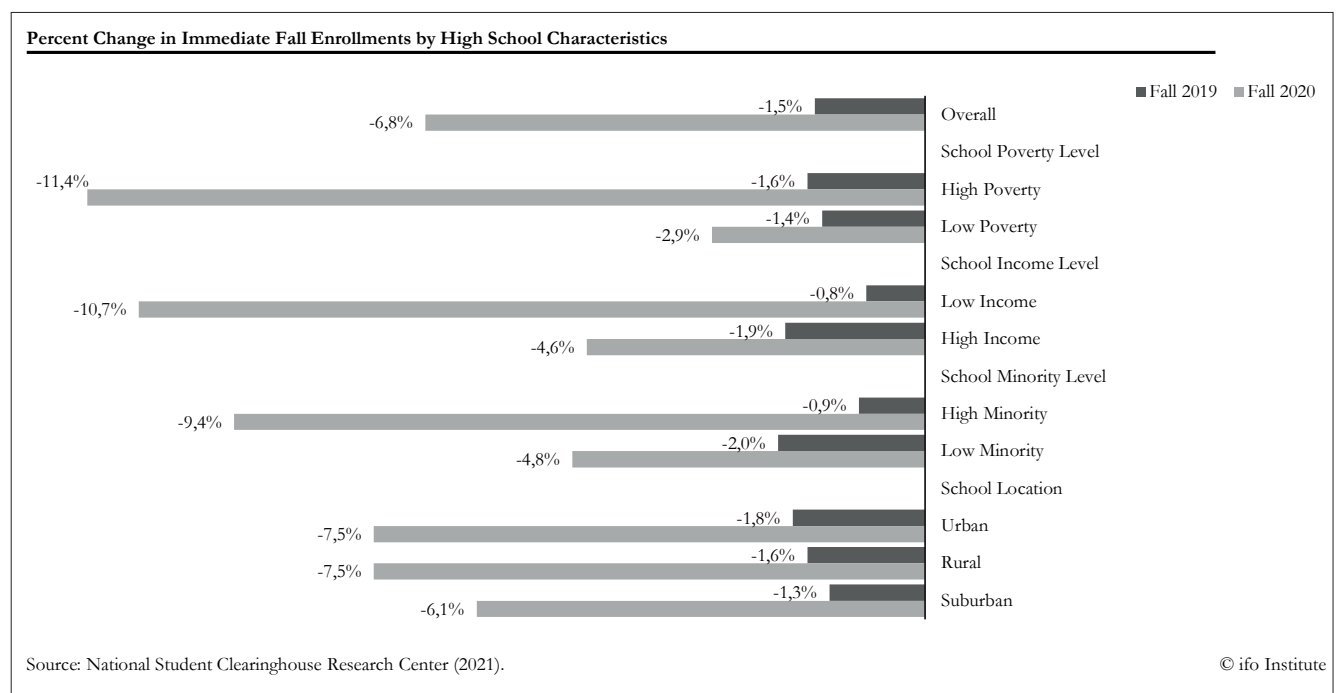


Figure 4



the first year of the pandemic. As higher education in the United States is relatively costly, many families most likely faced liquidity constraints due to the economic crisis and consequently might not have been able to further finance their children's education. High-school enrolment rates dropped by 6.8% on average in fall 2020 in a year-over-year comparison, which is 4.5 times larger than the drop between fall 2018 and 2019 (figure 4).

It is also important to highlight that the pandemic did not affect all high schools to the same extent. High schools with high poverty and low-income levels as well as schools with a high share of minorities faced a far more pronounced decrease in enrolment rates: for high-poverty schools, the fall in enrolment rates was four times greater than the decline rate in low-poverty schools (Causey et al. 2021).

Bulman and Fairlie (2021) find that college enrolment in Californian Community Colleges decreased precipitously by 15% in fall 2020 compared to the previous year, constituting the largest downturn over the last two decades. African-Americans and Latinx students experienced the largest drops (17%). When observing different groups of students, the sharpest decrease took place for first-time enrolment (22%). In summary, first evidence suggests that the pandemic caused a major and unprecedented disruption to higher education.

Looking at post-secondary education in Germany, the pandemic seems to have affected enrolment rates to a smaller extent. Even though overall university enrolment rates in Germany reached a new high in the fall term 2020/21 (compared to 2019, equivalent to an increase of 2%), the number of new students decreased by 4%. This can partly be explained by a drastic decrease of foreign students enrolling at German universities due to the pandemic situation (Statistisches Bundesamt 2021b).

Consequences of graduating during a recession

The effects of graduating during a period of adverse labour market conditions differ substantially depending on an individual's educational stage. While high-school graduation during a recession generally leads to a higher probability of further investing in education and thus fosters better outcomes later in life, college graduates tend to face negative consequences.³

Hampf et al. (2020) exploit the representative PIAAC⁴ survey to analyse the short- and long-term effects of graduation from high school during a recession and find a positive effect on subsequent human capital investment, e. g., college enrolment as well as literacy and numeracy skills later in life. However, the positive effect of recessions is smaller for individuals with lower socio-economic status and thus leads to an increase of educational inequality. This finding can most likely be explained by the liquidity constraints low-educated and low-skilled parents of the affected cohorts face because of a higher probability of losing their job during an economic downturn.⁵

The effects of graduating during a period of adverse labour market conditions differ substantially depending on an individual's educational stage.

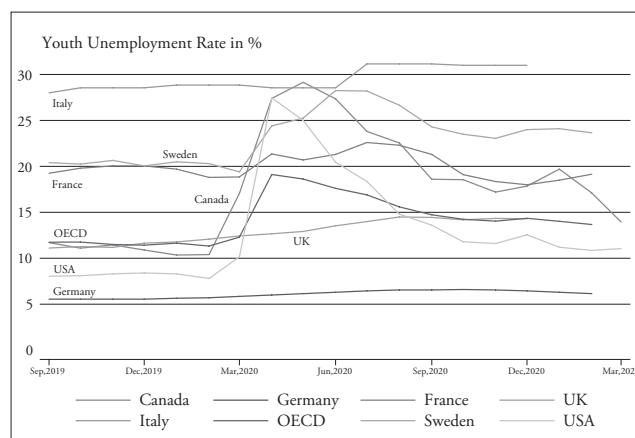
Oreopoulos et al. (2012) find substantial and unequal negative effects for graduating from college during a recession in Canada. A five percentage increase in unemployment rates causes a loss of

about 5% in cumulated earnings. Graduates from less prestigious colleges have larger and more persistent earnings losses than more advantaged graduates. Compared to the top graduate, with a loss of 8% of cumulative earnings in the first 10 years, the least advantaged one loses more than four times than the former. Apart from financial dis-advantages caused by bad labour market conditions, entering the job market during a recession can also have serious negative health effects. Schwandt and von Wachter (2020) provide evidence of an increase in mortality by disease-related causes in midlife for cohorts entering the labour market during a recession. Furthermore, they are less likely to marry, more likely to divorce and are more likely to remain childless.

Youth unemployment

The economic crisis caused by the shutdown of the economy has led to inevitable job losses around the globe (OECD 2021a). While there is a large academic discussion about individual as well as aggregate consequences of unemployment, not much focus has been put on young individuals' labour-market consequences. Figure 5 shows the development of youth unemployment (individuals aged 15-24) from September 2019 to March 2021. Four groups of countries can be distinguished: Italy had a relatively high rate of youth unemployment before the crisis which did not increase much during the pandemic, even though there was a slight increase in the second half of 2020. Sweden and France had similar pre-crisis unemployment rates but saw a different trend during the pandemic: both experienced an increase at the start of the pandemic in March 2020, but France had a much smaller increase in youth unemployment than Sweden, a pattern that seems to persist until today. Canada, the US, the UK and the OECD mean had relatively low pre-pandemic youth unemployment rates compared to the countries mentioned above but saw sharp increases at the beginning of the pandemic (with the exception of the UK) that last until today. Last, Germany had very low youth unemployment before the pandemic and saw virtually no increase in the numbers during the pandemic. This might be due to a variety of labour-market policies (such as the massive extension of the short-time working scheme) that Germany implemented to keep as many individuals as possible in employment during the crisis (Christl et al. 2021). Across all OECD countries, young women were more affected than young men, especially at the peak of the pandemic in March 2020. In September 2020, young women and men had returned to similar magnitudes of unemployment that until today persist at higher levels than pre-pandemic unemployment (not shown, OECD 2021b).

Figure 5



Effects on the mental health of young adults

Young people's mental health is disproportionately affected by the crisis. Data from Belgium, France and the United States suggest that the prevalence of anxiety and depression symptoms during the Covid-19 pandemic is around 30% to 80% higher for young individuals than for the general population. In Canada, 27% of young people aged 14-24 reported symptoms of anxiety, while the share in the age group 25-64 was only 19% (OECD 2021c) – even though adolescents had reported fewer mental health conditions in the years before the crisis than the general population (at the EU-level: 3.6% of 15-24 year-olds showed symptoms of depression vs. 6.9% among adults). In addition, younger children's (7-10 years) mental health seemed to suffer significantly more than older children's (11-17 years) (Ravens-Sieberer et al. 2021). Youth with previous mental health conditions are also particularly affected: A UK survey of adolescents with a mental illness history reports that 80% have experienced a deterioration in their mental health status (YoungMinds 2020). In general, evidence from several countries suggests that the share of adolescents with mental health conditions more than doubled when compared to the pre-crisis level (e.g., OECD 2021c; Ravens-Sieberer et al. 2021). As the pandemic continues, the situation is likely to worsen: According to Woessmann et al. (2021), 50% of parents considered the school closures in Germany in early 2021 a major psychological burden for their child – a clear increase in comparison to the first school closures in 2020 (38%). Economic and psychosocial stressors such as lifestyle and economic disruption during the pandemic seem to be an important predictor of within-pandemic emotional distress for adolescents (Shanahan et al. 2020). As Courtney et al. (2020: 688) put it, “[c]hildren and youth are highly vulnerable to the impact of sustained stressors during developmentally sensitive times, and thus, their mental health during and after the pandemic warrants special consideration.”

Notes

1 This article is a reprint. It first appeared in the CESifo-Forum 22 (4), <https://www.cesifo.org/de/publikationen/2021/aufsatz-zeitschrift/corona-class-2020-lost-generation>.

2 However, data is only available on a yearly basis, not quarterly. Thus, it is hard to say whether the 4th quarter of 2020 (fall term) might paint a slightly different picture.

3 The recession caused by the coronavirus crisis is different from prior ones in several ways. First, the current crisis' trigger was a pandemic and unlike previous recessions, did not result from financial factors but rather hit in a period of intact financial and labour markets. As a result, once the pandemic passes, the economic recovery is likely to take place at a faster pace than during a typical recession. Second, the ongoing crisis' major difference from prior ones in the context of education is the switch to online-teaching, which can have effects independent of the recession. Research shows that e.g., college students taking courses online instead of in-person are more likely to drop out and not to enrol again (Bettinger et al. 2017). Consequently, findings from previous recessions are not completely applicable to the current one.

4 The survey provides an international comparison of the assessments of literacy and numeracy skills as well as background information on educational attainment and labour market outcomes.

5 Arellano-Bover (2020) uses the same survey data and also finds evidence of a higher probability of investment in formal education for cohorts who face bad economic conditions during their education-work transition (18-24 years). However, and in contrast to Hampf et al., the same cohorts show worse results in terms of cognitive skills later in life (ages 36-59), pointing at long-term negative effects for their wages as skill losses are associated with wage losses. These divergent findings are most probably due to different and fewer countries included in Arellano-Bover's paper.

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Youth and COVID-19: long-lasting scars ahead?¹

by Miriam Allam, Moritz Ader and Gamze Igrioglu

Abstract: This article focuses on the long-term effects or, as mentioned in the title, scars of the COVID-19 pandemic. Surveys conducted by youth organisations in July-August 2021 show that the predominant concerns of the youth revolve around mental health, education and employment. The article then dives into the topics centred around the "disconnect" with democracy amongst the young people. Youth organisation's trust in governments has decreased since the start of the pandemic. Several reasons and explanations are brought forward, including a lack of youth representation and inadequate support for vulnerable groups. The article then concludes with an account of what seems to promote an increase in government trust by OECD survey respondents.

Keywords: OECD, Young people, COVID-19 pandemic, Mental health, Employment and education crises, Trust

Youth organisations express growing concerns about the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on mental health and access to education and employment

While the trajectory of the pandemic continues to evolve and varies across countries, most OECD countries were easing social distancing, confinement, and social isolation measures along with the ongoing deployment of vaccines when survey data was collected (July-August 2021). During this period, schools and universities in OECD countries gradually started re-opening after significant disruptions in 2020 and the first half of 2021 (OECD 2021j). The global recovery continued to progress but has lost momentum and remains uneven across countries (OECD 2021e). Youth unemployment rates in the OECD, which surged at the onset of the pandemic, had started to decline in many countries by July 2021 (OECD 2021f). At the same time, the prevalence of mental health symptoms related to anxiety and depression has risen dramatically among young people and remains higher than before the crisis (OECD 2021b; OECD 2021i).

The road to recovery is characterised by significant uncertainty and risks as new COVID-19 variants continue to appear. At the time of writing, the emergence of the Omicron strain has resulted in new lockdown and confinement measures and tightened travel restrictions in some OECD countries (OECD 2021e).

Findings from the 2021 survey show that many of the challenges identified by respondents of the 2020 survey persist 16 months later. When asked to identify the top three concerns regarding the effects of the crisis on young people, youth organisations surveyed in July-August 2021 across the OECD expressed greatest worries about the impact of COVID-19 on mental health (83%), education (64%) and employment (42%), followed by familial relations and friendships (35%), and limitation of individual freedoms (34%) (Figure 1).

Among two-time respondents, concerns about the impact of COVID-19 have been growing in the areas of mental health, education and familial relations and friendships. Moreover, concerns about challenges in accessing and maintaining employment remain at a very high level.

These results reflect young people's ongoing – and, in some cases, increasing – concerns about long-lasting scars that will stretch beyond employment and education.

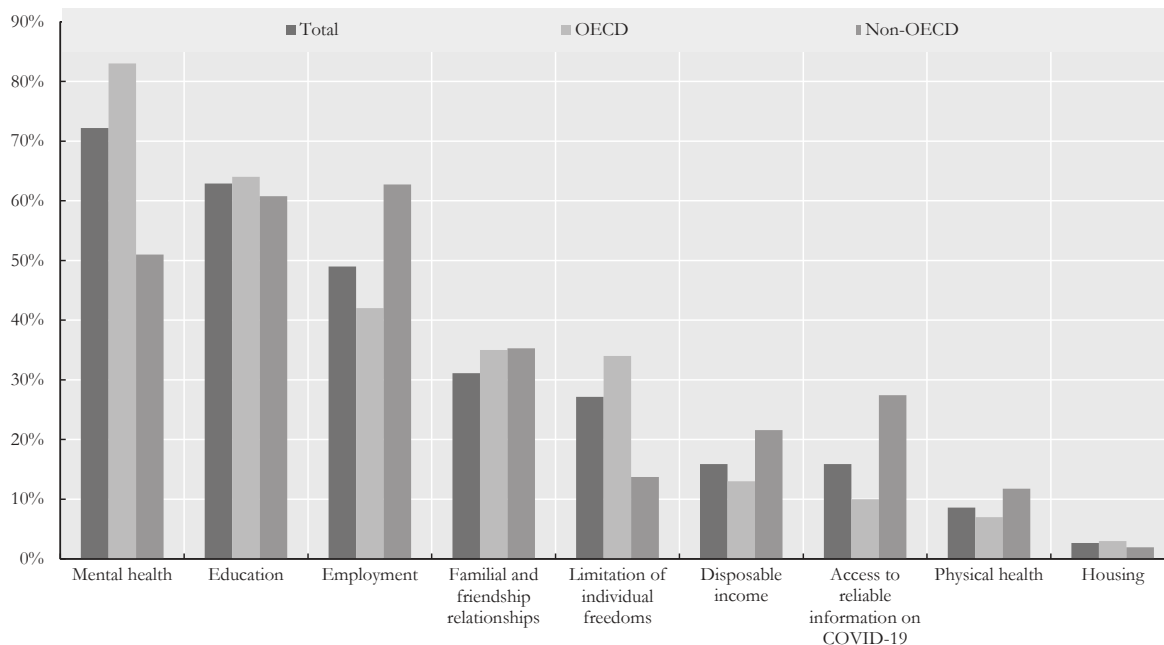
Youth organisations are increasingly concerned about young people's well-being

When asked about the long-term implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, respondents from OECD countries expressed greatest concerns about the well-being of young people (85%), followed by concerns about the impact on youth rights² (72%) and inequalities across age cohorts (69%). They also indicated important concerns about the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on the spread of disinformation (fake news) (67%), racial discrimination (61%), the risk that the crisis may divert government attention away from tackling climate change (59%) and political polarisation (56%) (Figure 2).

These findings differ considerably from the results of the 2020 edition of the survey. In the early stages of the pandemic, concerns expressed by youth organisations about the well-being of the elderly outweighed worries about young people's well-being, the spread of mis- and disinformation (fake news), increasing levels of public debt and racial discrimination (OECD 2020g).

A similar trend can be observed among two-time respondents who express strongest concerns about the well-being of young people and the spread of mis- and disinformation in the 2021 edition. In turn, they now express fewer concerns about the impact of the crisis on the well-being of the elderly and the rise in public debt. As the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted from being a public health

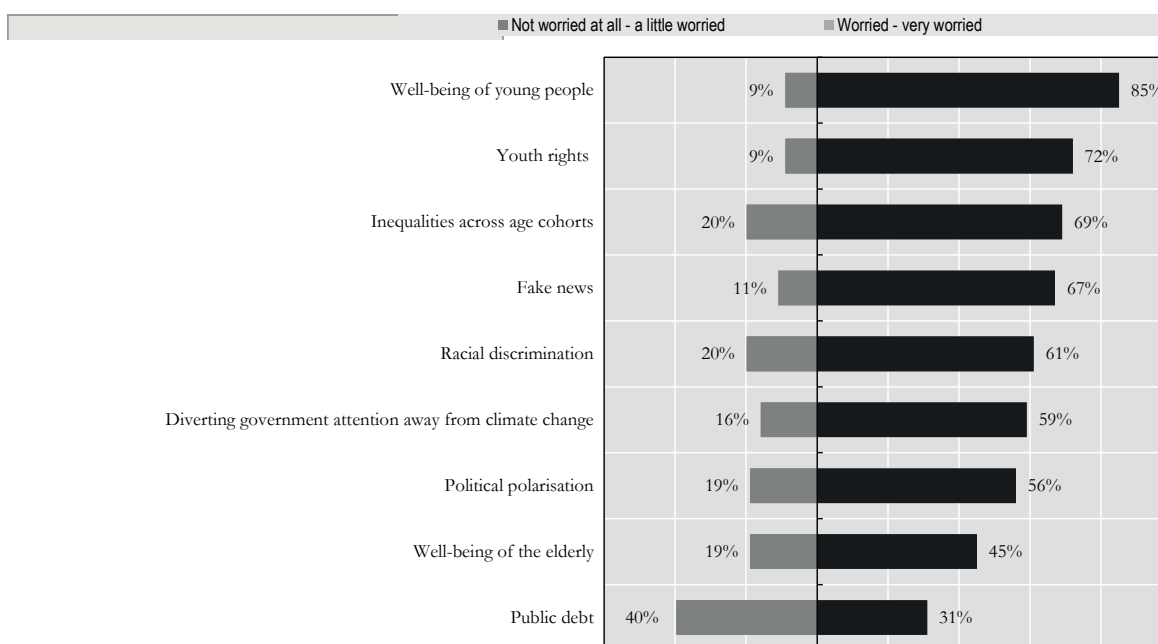
Figure 1. Youth organisations express significant concerns about mitigating the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on mental health, education and employment



Note: Respondents were asked to identify the top three areas in which young people were finding it most challenging to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 crisis. Data refers to the proportion of all 151 youth organisations from OECD and non-OECD countries that answered the survey, of which 100 respondents were from OECD countries and 51 from non-OECD countries (Annex 1.A).

Source: OECD 2021 Survey on Youth and COVID-19

Figure 2. Youth organisations are most concerned about the long-term implications of COVID-19 on the well-being of young people, youth rights and inequalities across age cohorts



Note: Respondents were asked to rate, on a scale from 1 to 5, the extent to which they were worried about the impact of COVID-19 in a number of areas, where 1 is not worried at all and 5 is very worried. The graph presents grouped answers 1-2 (Not worried at all – A little worried) and 4-5 (Worried – Very Worried), excluding those who answered 'Neither worried nor not worried'. Data refers to the proportion of youth organisations from the OECD that answered the survey (N=100 out of 151 respondents). Results are rounded to the nearest decimal.

Source: OECD 2021 Survey on Youth and COVID-19

emergency to a crisis of far reaching impacts, young people's concerns have also shifted. Amongst the respondents to the 2021 edition of the survey, a shift is seen towards growing worries about young people's well-being, a concern supported by findings that demonstrate that a majority of youth organisations are discontent with the way in which governments have delivered public services. These findings will be presented in greater detail below.

Findings also illustrate that concerns about the spread of mis- and disinformation⁴ associated with the COVID-19 pandemic persist, posing significant challenges to public perceptions about democracy, notably among young people (OECD 2021g). Social media accounts for a large part of the mis- and disinformation related to the pandemic (OECD 2020f). This is especially important for young people, given that they tend to be more digitally literate and source news predominantly from social media (Brennen 2020). Moreover, evidence shows that disinformation can fuel confusion, division and distrust, all of which has implications on young people's perceptions of their governments (OECD 2020g; OECD 2020f). While 54% of 15-year-old students in OECD countries reported being trained at school on how to recognise mis- and disinformation, data shows that those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds continue to score lower than their peers in terms of recognising the credibility of information sources (OECD 2021a). OECD evidence suggests that the rise of disinformation can also reinforce polarisation in society by harming electoral processes and outcomes and misleading citizens toward undemocratic alternatives (OECD 2020f). Indeed, more than one in two OECD-based respondents to the *2021 OECD Survey on COVID-19 and Youth* (56%) report being worried about political polarisation in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted from being a public health emergency to a crisis of far reaching impacts, young people's concerns have also changed.

Considerations about intergenerational justice and equity have also gained further traction, as the repercussions of the crisis are unfolding with differentiated impacts within and across age cohorts. While respondents identify inequalities across age cohorts (69%) as one of

the top concerns, a majority of respondents (59%) is concerned that the COVID-19 crisis will divert government attention away from taking measures to tackle climate change. This is particularly relevant as young people have been at the forefront of advocating for climate justice to be placed at the top of the political agenda, highlighting that young people and future generations will have to shoulder the burden and be most impacted by the consequences of the decisions taken today (OECD 2021c; OECD 2020a). Findings from an analysis conducted in July 2021 indeed point to the risk that the focus on short-term emergency responses may have superseded long-term economic, social and environmental objectives in the elaboration of recovery measures. As of July 2021, 83% of recovery funds had not considered environmental impacts or have negative effects on the environment (OECD 2021d).

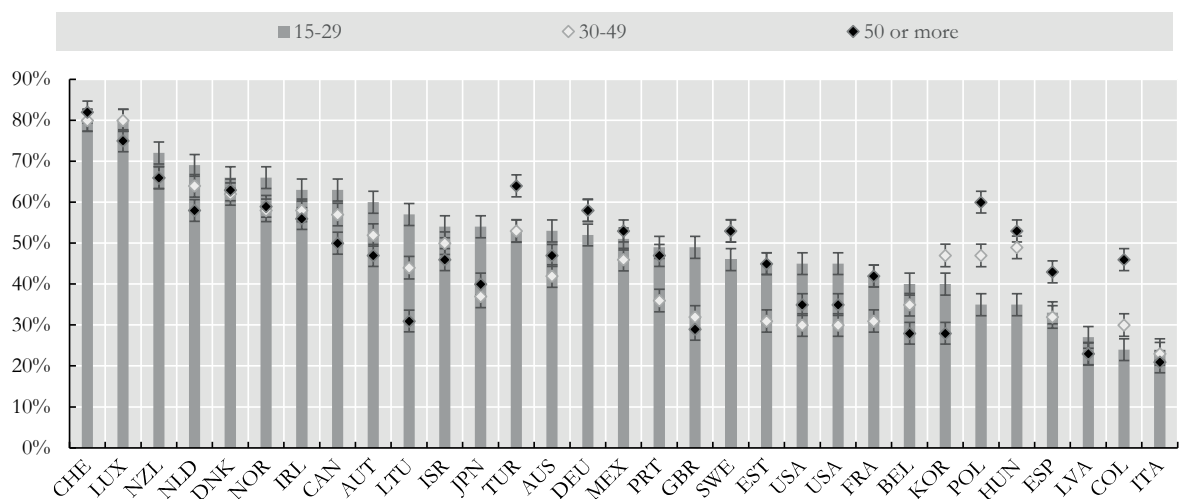
A moving target: young people's trust in government during the pandemic

In responding to the COVID-19 crisis, governments have taken measures that have drastically altered the everyday lives and behaviour of citizens. Trust in government is a critical factor in people's understanding of and compliance with extraordinary measures in extraordinary times (OECD 2021d). When citizens trust public institutions, they tend to comply voluntarily with rules to a greater extent (Murphy 2004). During the COVID-19 pandemic, studies have found a strong correlation between trust and compliance with measures taken to contain the spread of the virus (Bargain/Aminjonov 2020).

After a general deterioration of trust in government in the aftermath of the 2007-2008 financial crisis in many countries, governments had been slowly regaining the trust of young people (OECD 2020a). However, despite gradual improvements over the past decade, only 46% of people aged 15-29 expressed trust in national government across the OECD prior to the crisis though there is great variation across countries (Gallup 2019).

Since the onset of the pandemic, citizens' trust in government and their confidence in government's ability to handle and recover from the crisis have been volatile. Following the initial increase in trust levels in the early phase of the pandemic, most OECD

Figure 3. Trust in national government by age group, 2020



Source: Gallup World Poll, 2020

Findings from the OECD survey reaffirm a downward trend in the trust expressed by youth organisations in government.

countries have seen a decline over its course (Brezzi et al. 2021). According to the Gallup World Poll, in 2020, 51% of people in OECD countries trusted their government, a 6% increase from 2019 (Figure 3) (OECD 2021d). However, in 2021, 48%³ of people in OECD countries trusted their government, a 3% decrease from 2020 (Gallup 2021). While tracing trust and its respective drivers is challenging, studies point to similar trends for young people. According to a study by Eurofound, trust in government among people aged 18-34 dropped significantly between April 2020 and March 2021 in all EU countries (Eurofound 2021). Findings from the 2021 OECD Survey on COVID-19 and Youth reaffirm this downward trend over the past year. Whereas 40% of OECD-based youth organisations considered that their members' trust in government had increased in response to how the crisis was handled (as opposed to 22% reporting a decrease) in 2020, that share dropped to 16% of survey respondents in 2021. In turn, in 2021, 38% consider that their members' trust in government had decreased since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 4).

This trend is confirmed by evidence from two-time respondents. Among them, the share of organisations reporting a decrease in trust increased by 21 percentage points between April 2020 and July-August 2021.

Increasing levels of trust in government in times of crisis, combined with the public perception that a nation as a whole is under threat, is known as "rallying around the flag". It predicts an increase in trust during sudden crises as people unite behind leaders and institutions, and temporarily pay less attention to other policy issues (Brezzi et al. 2021). This effect is confirmed by the survey

data discussed above and has been discussed by other studies in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic (Kritzinger et al. 2021). In 18 of 22 OECD countries, average trust in government fell between April/May and June/July 2020, indicating that this effect quickly faded away (OECD 2021d).

Satisfaction with the delivery of public services during the pandemic is overall low

According to the OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions, the accessibility, responsiveness and quality of public services are important determinants of citizens' trust in government (OECD 2017b). Survey results show that, overall and across various sectors, respondents from youth organisations express low levels of satisfaction with the way governments have delivered public services for young people during the COVID-19 crisis.

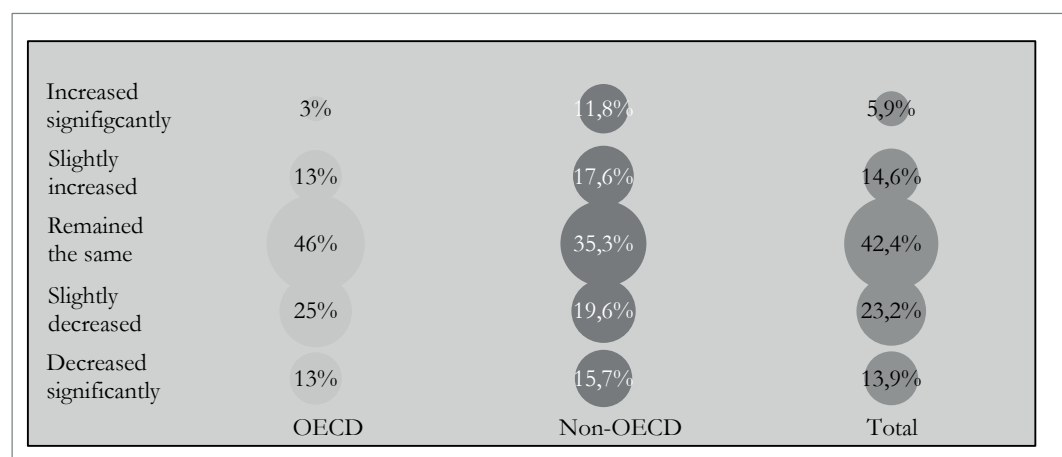
Youth organisations reported lowest levels of satisfaction with the provision of sports, culture and leisure services during the pandemic. In fact, 63% of OECD respondents expressed dissatisfaction in this area (see Figure 5). A majority of OECD respondents also expressed dissatisfaction with the delivery of public services in the field of education (60%), housing (56%), and employment (56%). Further, 46% of OECD-based respondents express dissatisfaction with the delivery of healthcare services during the pandemic, for instance by pointing to insufficient mental health support and unaffordability in some countries.

Respondents located in non-member countries point to similar challenges but express higher dissatisfaction with government performance in the area of employment (75%), followed by housing (54%), and sports, culture, leisure and education (53%).

These results also underline the importance of an integrated approach across different sectors and ministerial portfolios to support young people and mitigate the impacts of the crisis. For instance,

Figure 4. Youth organisations are more likely to report a decrease than an increase in their members' trust in government since the outbreak of COVID-19

Share of respondents indicating how their trust in government has evolved since the outbreak of COVID-19



Note: Respondents were asked to indicate changes of trust in government among members of their organisation since the outbreak of COVID-19. Options given included a. Increased significantly, b. Slightly increased, c. Neither increased nor decreased, d. Slightly decreased, and e. Decreased significantly. Data refers to the proportion of all 151 youth organisations from OECD and non-OECD countries that answered the survey. Responses are separated between OECD respondents (N=100) and non-OECD respondents (N=51).

Source: OECD 2021 Survey on Youth and COVID-19

different studies suggest that the lack of young people's access to sports, culture and leisure activities is likely to have a negative impact on their mental health (Hagell 2016; Rodriguez-Bravo/De Juanas/García-Castilla 2020). Identifying the cumulative effects of the lack of young people's access to certain public services and programmes is important to ensure ministries and agencies across the whole of government co-ordinate their interventions in the context of the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and beyond. The analysis of response and recovery plans points to significant gaps and the risk of fragmented support provided to young people. Notably, only a few countries spell out in their plans how young people shall be supported in areas beyond education and employment.

More than half of youth organisations appreciate the way in which governments have communicated on the risks of the pandemic and made use of scientific evidence

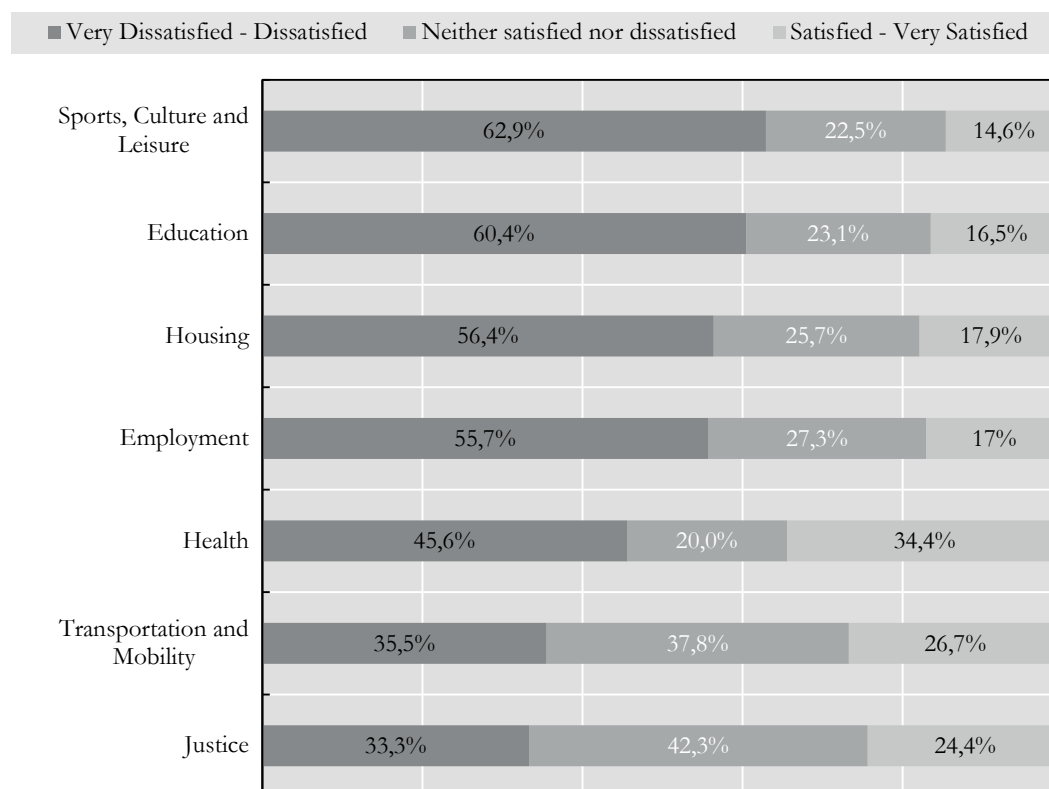
Evidence-based decision-making and effective public communication play a key role in retaining and increasing trust in government in times of crisis (OECD 2020f). When asked about their satisfaction with the way governments have reacted to the COVID-19 crisis, more than one in two OECD-based respondents (53%) state that their members are satisfied with the use of scientific evidence by governments when taking decisions to mitigate the pandemic. Moreover, 54% of youth organisations report being satisfied with the performance of governments to communicate about the risk of the pandemic to their citizens (see Figure 6). The results differ for respondents from non-member countries: While 66% state that their members are satisfied with the way their government communicated about the risks of the pandemic, only 37% are satisfied with their use of scientific evidence in decision-making.

Youth organisations point to elevated risks to public sector integrity

The COVID-19 crisis has revealed concerns about safeguarding public sector integrity, notably in the context of important public procurement decisions taken by governments and economic stimulus packages (OECD 2020c). Emergency situations that require rapid responses by governments can create conditions that make integrity violations more likely, most notably fraud and corruption (OECD 2020c). Several studies point to instances of price gouging and bribery during the pandemic, for instance, as medical equipment and supplies were often procured through emergency processes (OECD 2020b).

By diverting public resources away from their intended use, instances of fraud, corruption and bribery undermine the access to

Figure 5. Youth organisations in OECD countries express low levels of satisfaction with public services, especially in sports, culture and leisure, education, housing and employment



Note: Respondents were asked to rate, on a scale from 1 to 5, the extent to which the members of their organisation were satisfied with government delivery of public services for young people since the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis, where 1 is very dissatisfied and 5 is very satisfied. Answers 1-2 (Very Dissatisfied - Dissatisfied) and 4-5 (Satisfied - Very Satisfied) are grouped in this graph. Data refers to 78 to 91 (depending on answer option) youth organisations in OECD countries for which data for this question is available.

and quality of public services for citizens, including young people (OECD 2020e). Already the perception of increased levels of corruption is associated with negative impact on trust among citizens. For instance, findings from the April 2020 edition of the OECD Youth and COVID-19 Survey show that respondents who felt the integrity of public institutions was compromised were more likely to report that their trust in government had decreased (OECD 2020g). Among the OECD-based respondents to the 2021 survey edition, only 35% express satisfaction with the measures taken by governments to safeguard public sector integrity during the pandemic, compared to 26% of respondents from non-member countries.

Youth organisations feel that they lack a say in government response measures

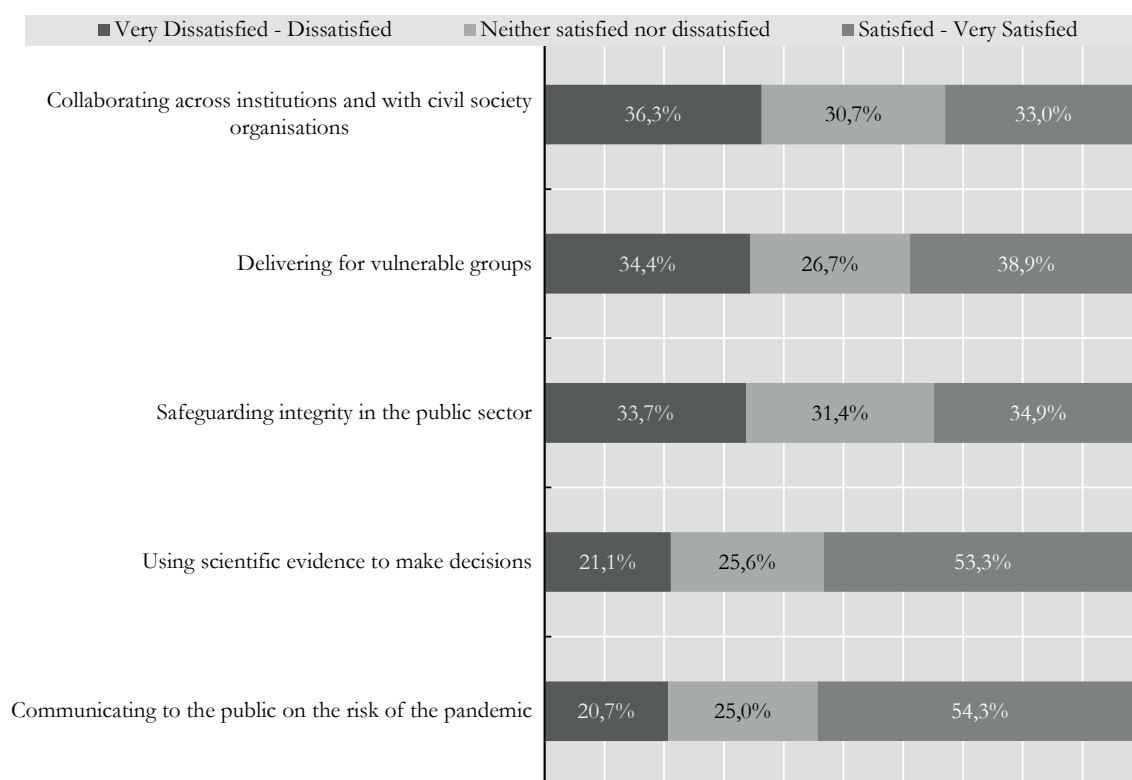
The OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government (OECD 2017a) underlines that open government is critical to building citizens' trust and achieving more inclusive policy outcomes. A recent study finds that European countries that invest in government openness, for instance by providing access to information proactively and engaging citizens in policy making, benefit from a higher level of citizen trust in the public system (Schmidhuber/Ingrams/Hilgers 2021). The study also suggests

that the perception of having meaningful opportunities for political participation can translate into greater levels of trust. Similarly, trust in national parliament is positively associated with turnout in national elections, while people's feelings of being able to understand and participate in political processes are positively related to their actual participation (Brezzi et al. 2021).

Only 33% of respondents from youth organisations in OECD countries (and 20% of respondents from non-members) are satisfied with how governments have collaborated across institutions and with civil society organisations to mitigate the crisis (see Figure 6). This finding resonates with the observation that many governments have operated with lower standards of stakeholder participation during the pandemic, for example when introducing emergency regulations (OECD 2021d).

A majority of respondents also feels that their government has not incorporated the views of young people when taking emergency measures and decisions to mitigate the crisis. Among the respondents from OECD countries, 15% feel their government considered young people's views when adopting lockdown and confinement measures. 22% feel that young people's views were taken into account in the purchase of goods, services and public works and 26% somewhat or strongly agree that their views were reflected in the design of financial schemes to mitigate the impact

Figure 6. Youth organisations appreciate the way in which governments have communicated on the risks of the pandemic and made use of scientific evidence but are less satisfied with measures to safeguard integrity, deliver for vulnerable groups and ensure collaboration



Note: Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which the members of their organisation were satisfied with government delivery of public services for young people since the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is very dissatisfied at all and 5 is very satisfied. Answers 1-2 (Very Dissatisfied - Dissatisfied) and 4-5 (Satisfied - Very Satisfied) are grouped in this graph. Data refers to 86 to 92 (depending on answer option) youth organisations in OECD countries for which data for this question is available.

Source: OECD 2021 Survey on Youth and COVID-19

on jobs and income loss. Similarly, around one in three OECD-based respondents (35%) considers that governments have incorporated young people's views when prioritising age cohorts in vaccination campaigns (see Figure 7).

While some infrastructure services have been disrupted in order to stop the spread of the coronavirus (e.g. air transport, railway, urban public transportation), other public services and infrastructure industries have been key to government emergency and recovery responses, most notably health infrastructure, digital infrastructure and telecommunications (OECD 2020d). In this area, more than half of the respondents from OECD (54%) and non-member countries (52%) believe their government has not incorporated the views of young people when taking decisions. These results show that, across some of the most impactful decisions taken by governments during the pandemic, members of youth organisations feel young people had few opportunities to meaningfully shape them.

Only four in ten OECD-based respondents are satisfied with the support provided to young people in vulnerable circumstances

Citizens' perception of fairness, in both processes and outcomes of public policy, is a critical dimension of trust. Higher levels of trust are related to a more equal distribution of political power amongst members of society. Demographic and socio-economic factors, including gender, age and income are important in explaining differences in public trust. For example, in most OECD

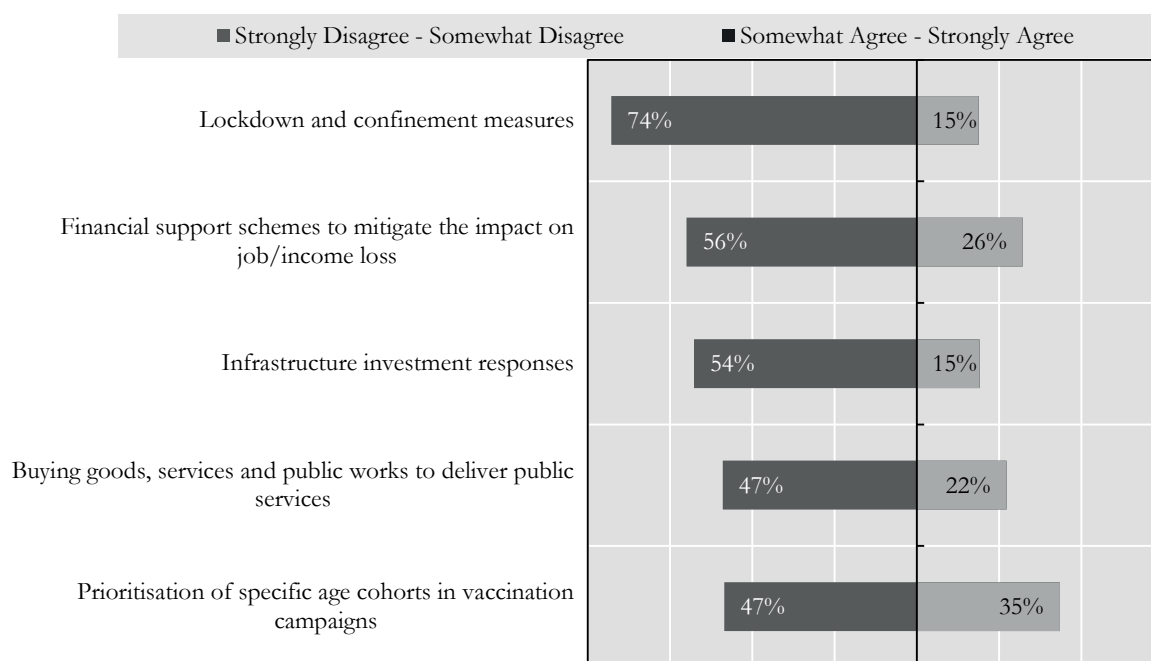
countries, people with higher income tend to have higher levels of trust in government, although important differences exist and the direction of causality is not clear (Brezzi et al. 2021).

The pandemic has exacerbated inequalities between different age groups and among young people of different backgrounds and identities (OECD 2020g). For example, unemployment rose considerably more among young women than among young men at the onset of the pandemic (OECD 2021l). Inequalities in access to internet and digital devices have translated into barriers to learning and working in remote settings (OECD 2021l). Moreover, young women, young people with lower socio-economic status, and without a job reported higher rates of mental distress in 2020-21 (OECD 2021i).

The OECD Youth and COVID-19 Survey found that respondents from youth organisations were more likely to report a decrease in their trust in government when they felt government had not done enough to support vulnerable groups (OECD 2020g). According to the 2021 survey data, only 39% of respondents in OECD countries are satisfied with the support governments have provided to groups in vulnerable circumstances during the pandemic (see Figure 6). This issue is even more pronounced in non-member countries in which only around a quarter of respondents (26%) are satisfied.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, youth organisations have played a critical role in providing support to vulnerable groups, including older people in care facilities, disabled people, NEETs and

Figure 7. Youth organisations feel that they lack a say in government responses to the pandemic



Note: Respondents were asked to rate, on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is Strongly Disagree at all and 5 is Strongly Agree, whether the government had incorporated young people's views on a number of measures. The graph presents grouped answers 1-2 (Strongly Disagree - Somewhat Disagree) and 4-5 (Somewhat Agree - Strongly Agree), excluding those who answered, 'Neither Disagree nor Agree'. Data refers to 85 to 93 (depending on answer option) youth organisations in OECD countries for which data for this question is available. Results are rounded to the nearest decimal.

Source: OECD 2021 Survey on Youth and COVID-19

migrants, to mitigate its impacts (OECD 2020g). While evidence from the analysis of national recovery plans across OECD countries shows that several outline specific measures to support vulnerable groups, explicit commitments to strengthen youth workers, volunteers and their institutional capacities are rarely mentioned.

How to bridge the “disconnect”: young people and democracy

Foundations of democracy such as free and open elections, the separation of powers, the rule of law and the protection of human rights have long been recognised as anchors of good governance (OECD 2021g). However, the Global Satisfaction with Democracy Report finds that dissatisfaction with democracy has risen since the mid-1990s, and is reaching an all-time global high, particularly in developed democracies (Foa 2020).

Dissatisfaction with democracies manifests itself in different ways, including in declining party membership, declining voter turnout, a lack of trust in public institutions as well as the rise of populism and increased polarisation (OECD 2021g).

According to a study undertaken by the University of Cambridge based on data from 160 countries between 1973 and 2020, younger generations have become more dissatisfied with democracy not only in absolute terms, but also relative to how older generations felt at the same stages in life (Foa et al. 2020). The study finds that while a majority of millennials (defined as born between 1981 and 1996) today express “dissatisfaction” with the way democracy works in their countries, a generation ago those at a comparable age were largely satisfied with democratic performance (Foa et al. 2020). In the United States, levels of dissatisfaction with democracy have risen by over a third in just one generation (Foa 2020). The underlying reasons behind the risk of a “disconnect” between

The government engaged with civil society. Across government departments, there was a shift from consultation to partnership and co-design with stakeholders to harness pre-existing knowledge.
Youth organisation representative mentioning drivers for increasing satisfaction with democracy

an increasing share of young people and democracy are shaped by various factors, notably the national context, perceptions of how governments are serving younger citizens and their capacity to respond to national and global challenges, (OECD 2021g) as well as a growing intergenerational divide in life opportunities (Foa et al. 2020). Higher levels of youth unemployment and wealth inequality have left younger citizens facing increasing difficulty in starting an independent life, fuelling “dissatisfaction” with the way democracy delivers for them.

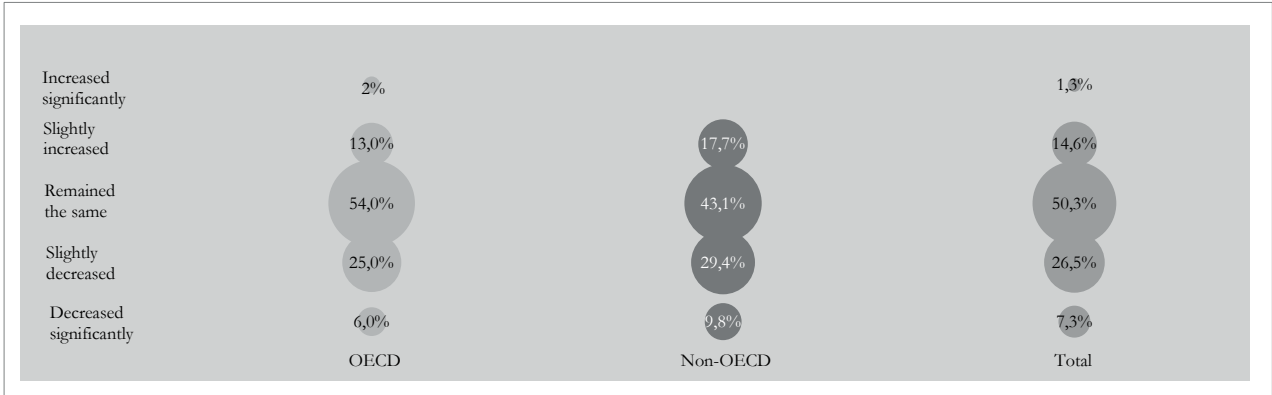
The amount of people believing in fake news and conspiracy theories has increased and damaged democracy.
Youth organisation representative mentioning drivers for decreasing satisfaction with democracy

Moreover, young people remain underrepresented in public institutions, tend to participate less in elections than older peers and their share among the voting population is shrinking as a result of ageing, contributing to further shifting political weight and influence to older age groups (OECD 2021g; OECD 2021k). Young people’s perceptions of democratic governments to handle the climate crisis might cast doubts on the overall ability of democracies to handle long-term, complex and interconnected challenges and invest in long-term priorities over short-term considerations (OECD 2021c).

The COVID-19 pandemic risks further exacerbating these challenges. Around one in three respondents from OECD countries (31%) states that their members’ satisfaction with democracy has decreased since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, while only 15% report an increase (figure 8). A survey by Eurofound⁵ points to a similar trend. Satisfaction with democracy among people aged 18-34 decreased between July 2020 and March 2021 in all EU countries (Eurofound 2021).

A recent study finds that individuals who experience epidemics during their transition to adulthood display less confidence in political leaders, governments, and elections, which persists over their lifetime. Long-lasting scars of the crisis are therefore not only a concern when the employment and income prospects of

Figure 8. Youth organisations are more likely to report a decrease rather than an increase, in their members’ satisfaction with democracy since the outbreak of COVID-19



Note: Respondents were asked to indicate changes of satisfaction with democracy among members of their organisation since the outbreak of COVID-19. Options given included a. Increased significantly, b. Slightly increased, c. Neither increased nor decreased, d. Slightly decreased and e. Decreased significantly. Data refers to the proportion of all 151 youth organisations from OECD and non-OECD countries that answered the survey. Responses are separated between OECD respondents (N=100) and non-OECD respondents (N=51).

Source: OECD 2021 Survey on Youth and COVID-19

young people are considered but also in terms of their association with democratic processes and institutions over the life cycle (Aksoy/Eichengreen/Saka 2020).

When asked about why the satisfaction of their members with democracy had increased, OECD-based respondents point to the importance of government's responsiveness, inclusive decision-making and fair treatment of all citizens as well as the significance of accountability, public integrity, transparency and clear communication. Some respondents mentioned that satisfaction with democracy increased as their members observed an increase in social cohesion and recognised that governments had made efforts to protect human and civil rights. In turn, respondents reporting a decline in satisfaction with democracy during the crisis pointed to its impact on civil and human rights. Some respondents also stressed that the crisis had demonstrated government's inability to address challenges and deliver for citizens, contributing to a more pessimistic outlook and raising doubts about the coherence of government measures. Some respondents also raised concerns over the increase in intergenerational inequalities, lack of support for vulnerable groups and increasing political and social polarisation as well as the lack of transparency and integrity, reliable information, the spread of fake news and accountability.

Notes

1 This article is a reprint. It first appeared as Section 1 in OECD (2022): *Delivering for youth: How governments can put young people at the centre of the recovery*, 7-21. OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19). <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/delivering-for-youth-how-governments-can-put-young-people-at-the-centre-of-the-recovery-92c9d060/>.
2 While definitions of youth rights vary across international bodies and organisations, the UN OHCHR postulates that human rights of youth refer to the full enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms by young people (UN 2021f).

3 This paper employs the following OECD definitions of dis- and misinformation. Misinformation: false or inaccurate information not disseminated with the intention of deceiving the public. Disinformation: false, inaccurate, or misleading information deliberately created, presented and disseminated to deceive the public. (OECD 2021h).

4 Findings exclude Chile, Israel and Luxembourg as data for these countries was not available at time of publishing.

5 The living, working and COVID-19 survey by Eurofound gathers information from respondents via a web link. Anyone aged 18 or older with access to the internet could complete the questionnaire online. Hence, it presents evidence from a non-representative sample.

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Dieter Dohmen and Klaus Hurrelmann (eds.) (2021): Generation Corona? Wie Jugendliche durch die Pandemie benachteiligt werden (engl.: Generation Corona? How young people are disadvantaged by the pandemic)¹

Reviewed by Lutz Finkeldey²

Topic

The title of the book says it all. The authors present a comprehensive work on the Corona pandemic which – by the standards of academia – takes a very up-to-date look at children, young people and their parents in relation to day-care, school, transition to and from training and work, in order to scientifically explore individual and institutional factors with regard to educational inequality such as health and well-being. In a concluding outlook, the two editors clarify whether there is a “Generation Corona”.

Authors

In addition to the two editors, 51 authors have contributed to the book. They come from the fields of qualitative and quantitative health as well as social, educational and childhood research. In terms of research strategy, they work at the interface of children, young people, parents and institutions with society, politics and the economy.

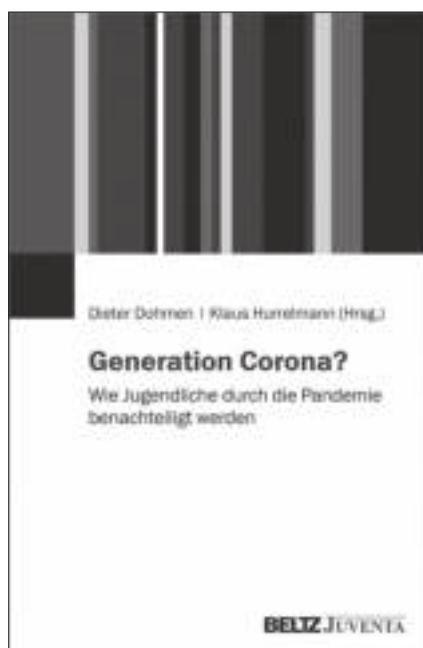
Structure

The introduction and overview are laid out in a classical manner. General framework data are confronted with the special situation of children and adolescents. The phases of the pandemic are included as far as possible in order to capture factors of change in the behaviour of children, young people, families, and educational institutions.

The book's contributions are divided into four thematic areas: The pandemic with regard to family and day-care centres, its influence on teaching and learning behaviour, its effects on the life-stages of school, education and occupation, and consequences for health and well-being. A commented summary on the question “Will there be a Generation Corona?” concludes the anthology.

Contents

Without lapsing into sweeping judgements and prejudices, all authors ultimately pursue the question of whether, as the editors write in the preface, the metaphor “Generation Corona” is viable. They eschew labelling and an inflationary use of the term. Lasting stigmatisations are avoided, which is why a clear scholarly pic-



ture of “Generation or Non-Generation Corona” emerges.

In the first section of the first topic *Pandemic, Family, Day-care*, Wido Geis-Thöne criticises the too-late intervention of politics during the first lockdown – a neglect which obviously turned out better the second time, even though old and new social imbalances were still being dragged along. Families with problems in the domestic environment, including single parents, families with a migration background, educationally disadvantaged families, families with several children and families with social benefits in the background are among the losers, both statistically and qualitatively.

The article *Being a child in times of Corona* by Alexandra Langmeyer, Thorsten Naab et al. focuses on exactly that. Corona, as something that has suddenly arrived,

is changing the living environment of children to an extreme degree, because hardly any face-to-face communication remains possible – which is why new forms of media-mediated communication have to be developed. Children of parents with system-relevant professions were more often able to fall back on family networks. Necessity and possibility are the antipodes here. Corona hit early childhood education the hardest because there are no concepts for staying at home. A change, though well-known, is even more drastically evident in media behaviour. Children from well-educated households are more likely to use the educational function of computers, while educationally deprived children focus on play. In both groups, a lack of social contacts constitutes a higher risk, which, if it were to become manifest, would have to be addressed by educational policy.

Findings on the home and institutional learning environment during the closure of day care centres by Elisa Oppermann, Franziska Cohen et al. is the last article in the first thematic focus. The authors present a (partial) study by the Otto Friedrich University of Bamberg. Children's learning environments are the focus of domestic educational activities during lockdown. A central question concerns the possible compensation of institutional education. It is clear that complete compensation is never possible. Good support systems especially for disadvantaged families would have to be in place. When investigating contacts between children

and day-care centres, it became clear that day-care centres have established (organisational) contact with parents, but regularity in the sense of educational partnerships is very rare.

The second topic area begins with an article by Nele McElvany, Chantal Lepper et al. which is entitled *Teaching during the Corona Pandemic*. The authors point to a hitherto unknown situation in which students have hardly any digital experience in home-based self-organisation – even with the support of their parents. Even at the time of the second lockdown, schools were still inadequately equipped with digital media, and concept-oriented distance learning was often unknown. Moreover, a new form of social inclusion had to be tapped.

Nevertheless, there are many positive evaluations from both sides, although there were definitely learning deficits in some subjects.

How do German schools deal with the Corona crisis is the next article by Werner Klein on the school barometer. From 9 to 15 December 2020, an online survey that was designed to be representative was conducted among 1015 teachers. According to the author, it is difficult to give a clear answer to the initial question because many problems at schools occur very differently. Grammar schools have better digital equipment than other types of schools. Only one third of the teachers have a sufficient internet connection at home and social requirements of pupils are not taken into account. On the other hand, learning by doing is often seen as positive for self-organised learning. Hybrid and distance learning are seen as self-taught digital fast-track courses with an extended professional habitus. The accumulated learning arrears during the lockdowns remain the most critical factor that needs to be addressed.

Stephan Gerhard Huber, Christoph Helm et al. also take up the view Werner Klein has cast on the German school barometer for Austria and Switzerland. Positive or negative effects vary greatly between pupils. Autonomy and independence as well as family support are on the positive side, while exam anxiety and a loss of both daily structure and social contacts are on the negative side. A correlation between positives and negatives is evident in younger students compared to older students, because a higher autonomy of personality and learning behaviour develops with increasing age. Experiencing positive self-efficacy is the key.

Ludger Wößmann, Vera Freundl et al. analyse learning failures and educational policies by asking the question: *How have school children spent the time of school closures?* For example, learning time has almost halved from 7.4 hours a day to 3.6 hours. The time freed up is spent consuming media, especially in the case of lower-performing pupils. Parents assume that their children learned less than usual, although they were more engaged in school. Well over half of the school children had digital lessons only once a week. Individual conversations hardly took place, while familiar worksheets were the most common learning medium. Here, too, there is a clear discrepancy between children from higher-education families and those with little education. Finally, the authors note that the economic and educational consequences of the pandemic must be considered together.

Marc-André Chénier, Joana Elisa Maldonado and Kristof de Witte entitle their quantitative research on the pandemic *The impact of school closure days on standardised test scores*. Although it is known worldwide that school closures entail enormous individual and societal costs, they are not the focus of government strategies. To name but one negative example of widespread school closures:

a broad-based study (6th grades in Flemish Catholic schools) in Flanders shows results that are probably not to be expected at first glance. Mathematics grades remain more or less the same, while deficits in the language spoken at school become continuously virulent. This affects disadvantaged pupils in particular. The result may not be as severe in other countries, but without the commitment of policy makers, this discrepancy is likely to widen. Globally, it can be said that many negatives are striking in school closures – albeit in broad heterogeneity.

The article by Mathias Huebener, Laura Schmitz et al., *Familial, Individual and Institutional Factors Influencing Educational Inequalities*, first establishes that educational inequalities are reinforced by the lockdown because the “equaliser” of collective learning is missing. If, in addition, family resources are scarce or non-existent and school is no longer a place of integration, inequalities are reinforced. Digital equipment and use intervene on both sides.

Burghard Jungkamp and Kai Maaz present the recommendations of the FES-Commission *Creating Equal Opportunities for All Children and Young People*. The chronology of a “real-time experiment” is followed by the still unfulfilled equal opportunities in schools and education, which must continue to be addressed. Lessons from the pandemic mean developing a Plan B and C, in addition to Plan A, to provide students with security and guidance. System relevance, disparities, structures, design, prioritisation, support, common learning time, understanding inequality as equality, digitalisation, necessary competences, learning mentorships and teacher training (and more) are the more internal fields of equal opportunities. Social risk situations also prevent possible educational success.

The third topic area opens with *Homeschooling, digitalisation and educational justice* by Christina Anger and Axel Plünnecke. There are fewer staff shortages in the STEM professions due to the economic slump. The demographic need for replacements as well as an economic recovery after Corona show a great need. If no countermeasures are taken today, the less educated pupils, in particular, will be lost. In Denmark, digitalisation has been going on for about 20 years, so that Corona, for example, can be handled flexibly. What is lacking in Germany is a systematic development of digitalisation in schools, the corresponding concepts, and appropriately trained teachers.

Dieter Dohmen, in his article *The transition from school to apprenticeship: The eye of the needle is narrowing*, deals with the increasing academisation of professions and its consequences. On the one hand, classic apprenticeship occupations are falling away because of higher qualifications, while on the other hand, the current pandemic is leading to a further downward spiral for educationally disadvantaged young people because they do not meet the demands of the apprenticeship market.

The fourth and last topic area is opened by Ulrike Ravens-Sieberer, Anne Kamann et al. with *Mental health and quality of life of children and adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Critical life events – such as COVID-19 – certainly lead to psychological stress. The COPS study, which the authors take a look at with borrowings from the BELLA study, was developed for children and adolescents in order to look at their resources and stresses during the pandemic. The study gives important indications of how socially disadvantaged children and adolescents are affected. The care given to this vulnerable group was also taken into

account because, among other things, their subjective views were collected.

The last contribution in the main part of the book, *Youth and Corona in Germany and Austria: Young People in Lockdown*, was made by Simon Schnetzer, Klaus Hurrelmann et al. The data used for the conclusions come from the study *Young Germans 2021*, in which 14- to 39-year-olds were surveyed. On the positive side, the study shows that two thirds of young people behave adequately in terms of learning during the pandemic. On the negative side, about one third are in transition from school to work and do not make a smooth transition into working life. The findings show more positive things than are conveyed in public. Despite all this, a third of them have no prospects for the future.

Dieter Dohmen and Klaus Hurrelmann summarise and classify the contents and the subject matter of the book. The authors come out against the inflationary use of the notion “Generation Corona”. This term can only be used in a distinct sense if “more fundamental and lasting structural restrictions or deterioration of the future opportunities of a larger group of children, adolescents and young adults can be identified and these are quite predominantly due to the circumstances during the Corona pandemic.” (277). The findings from this book on social differences, qualification restrictions, future opportunities, the position of parents, the structural overload of educational institutions including digital equipment, digital competences of teachers, family conditions and learning opportunities correspond to this definition. Linguistic and pedagogical competences of pupils, teachers and parents flow into the mentioned criteria accordingly. In terms of the educational hierarchy, grammar schools were indirectly better prepared due to the more pronounced self-education processes of the pupils. Corona has negative consequences for the transitional system between school, training and work, which, if the qualifications of young people continue to diverge, will become even more of a refuge for those who have failed. Corona accelerates this process towards “Generation Corona”.

Discussion

The articles are ambitious and show a broad understanding of a very recent social challenge. The versatility of the approaches to the Corona pandemic is impressive. This approach always leads to relative contradictions because the value setting of the initial discipline, when confronted with others, perpetuates the original logic. Dohmen and Hurrelmann confront this briefly in the summary. Corona shows that our previous knowledge is not sufficient and that we have to work with open concepts of knowledge. This creates a relative dilemma for the book. Why Corona has been able to triumph worldwide remains a mystery. On the one hand, digitalisation is called for, but on the other hand, its culpability in the spread of the pandemic as well as youth unemployment through the forcing of an increasingly accelerated world market cannot be entirely denied. A necessary criticism of this book lies in its defensive inclusion. Education could set standards that are in the interests of the people and not dependent on economic processes and, as it happens, Corona. We would have to ask ourselves, what mistakes have we made to make anyone unemployed in the first place? If we want to take children's and human rights seriously, we have to address this thinking taboo. The problem is not the “Corona generation”, i.e. those who have been excluded at an even faster rate, but those who live in today's thinking bar-

riers. That is where the real generation problem lies, because large parts of the education and labour market are sacrosanct and thus structured by relations of power. Therefore, we have already left the future behind us.

Conclusion

This is an impressively up-to-date book which contains well-founded contributions that are also tied together very well. For people from all corners of the education sector, this book will serve as a very good basis for reading up on the Corona complex or for drawing aspect-related conclusions. The topics are aptly and clearly presented for practitioners in day-care centres and schools, child and youth welfare services as well, and form an excellent basis for current conceptual developments. As absurd as it may sound, this is one of the books that should be compulsory reading in politics and economics in order to escape the hearsay and to breathe some actual substance. Understanding is very much based on the core competence of reading. Managing is at the top of the list today... with what content? “Generation Corona” provides all young people, especially the third of the excluded, with a scientifically sound voice that only resonates when we want to hear it. Beyond the book, it remains important to transform the repair shop for the excluded into a society for all. Give them the rod and not the scales from the fish.

Dohmen, Dieter / Hurrelmann, Klaus (eds.) (2021): Generation Corona? Wie Jugendliche durch die Pandemie benachteiligt werden (engl.: Generation Corona? How young people are disadvantaged by the pandemic). Weinheim, Basel: Beltz Juventa. 302 pages. ISBN 978-3-7799-6546-6. Price: €24.59.

Notes

1 This book review is a reprint with kind permission from socialnet. It first appeared in German in: Lutz Finkeldey. Rezension vom 16.08.2021: Dieter Dohmen / Klaus Hurrelmann (eds.) (2021): Generation Corona? Wie Jugendliche durch die Pandemie benachteiligt werden. Weinheim/Basel: Beltz Juventa. ISBN 978-3-7799-6546-6. In: socialnet Rezensionen, ISSN 2190-9245, <https://www.socialnet.de/rezensionen/28634.php>, date of access 01.06.2022. English translation by Noah Croitoru and Markus Rutsche.

The *socialnet* collection (www.socialnet.de) features more than 22000 book reviews and grows by 1000 new pieces per year. Readers will find up to date debates of all relevant academic and professional discourses across all areas of the German, Austrian and Swiss welfare system as well as education and healthcare.

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Steven Taylor: The psychology of pandemics: Preparing for the next global outbreak of infectious disease

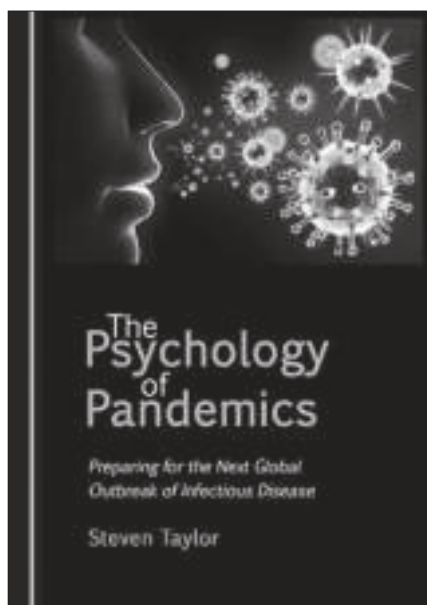
Reviewed by Konrad Goldenbaum and William Clark

In his book, *The Psychology of Pandemics: Preparing for the next global outbreak of infectious disease*, Steven Taylor discusses how pandemics should be managed with the psychology of the people affected in mind. Steven Taylor is a professor and clinical psychologist at the University of British Columbia. His work focuses on anxiety disorders, related clinical conditions and the psychology of pandemics. It is important to note that this book was published a few weeks before the outbreak of COVID-19. Now, two years later, after being used by government officials worldwide to guide us through the pandemic, we will discuss whether Taylor's psychological research and analysis remain a must-read for understanding the psychology of pandemics.

The book firstly covers the basics: why is a pandemic stressful to us? It discusses the fear of getting ill and the stress that measures like social distancing might put on us, and presents a scheme to understand why there might be so many different patterns of reaction to observe. It goes on to connect these questions with the reaction and adherence to methods for managing pandemics, thereby underlining this book's main message: The psychological factors play an essential role in the success or failure of fighting any pandemic. It then discusses the risks of a mental-health pandemic that usually accompanies a viral one, and how to react to it.

This book was meant to prepare the world for the next pandemic. It does so in four ways. It (1) analyses psychological and emotional reactions and maladaptive behaviours; (2) examines the research and theory relevant to understanding the psychological reactions at an individual and societal level; (3) discusses empirically supported methods to address these psychological factors; and finally (4), it describes the implications for public health policy. The psychological aspects of a pandemic are often overlooked or not given enough consideration, but a better understanding of how certain people or groups act and for what reason allows for more informed strategies to be developed; e.g. to improve vaccination rates or to reduce the risk of the hospitals/doctors being overly, and given this context often unnecessarily, overrun by people having a high level of health anxiety.

A core piece of research and theory of this book focuses on the topic of personality traits as emotional vulnerability factors. Individuals can usually be classified into two overarching personality types. The first is unrealistic optimism. Traits that accompany



this type are a sense of invulnerability and the utilisation of the blunting (avoiding threatening information and seeking distraction) cognitive style. Furthermore, this type usually results in the individuals having low levels of pandemic-related anxiety and therefore a lower probability of sticking to the recommended hygiene and other health recommendations. Such individuals would therefore be seen as people with a higher risk of being spreaders of the virus (Rood 2015). The second is classified as negative emotionality (neuroticism). People who fall into this category suffer from high levels of health anxiety and utilise the monitoring (the tendency to seek threat-relevant information) cognitive coping style. People in this category are more likely to worry excessively and often also follow restrictions beyond those

placed by the state (Rood 2015), e.g. continue to isolate even when lockdown measures are lifted or eased or excessive disinfection of hands and all surfaces. By categorising and describing both these starkly contrasting personality types, Taylor has provided us with important insight into the psyche of people affected by pandemics. Information and further research such as this can allow for more informed decision-making, as potential reactions can be more easily and accurately predicted.

Taylor also discusses interesting research conducted in the field of conspiracy theories and more specifically, how fears and beliefs spread through social networks. Conspiracy theories arise during times of uncertainty as people try to make sense of threatening events and developments. What has been discovered and described in this book is that social media provides an echo chamber for people with similar views, e.g. individuals that are vehemently against vaccinations. Social media provides a space where people can join groups of like-minded individuals. In its essence, this is not intrinsically negative; but what has been seen to happen is that views that differ from that of the group do not seem to manage to permeate into the discussions. Therefore, members of such groups are constantly only faced with information that backs up their own beliefs. An interesting piece of research mentioned by Taylor is that anti-vaccination sites may be better at their methods of communication. In a study which compared two anti-vaccination sites to two pro-vaccination sites, the findings show that the anti-vaccination sites were more interactive, but also provided information on both sides (granted, pro-vaccination information stated here might be skewed or altered to support their ar-

guments). The noteworthy result of this study is that interactive websites seemed to improve the level of vaccination acceptability by the public. Of course, anti-vaccination sites aren't frequently visited by the general public, but these findings can nonetheless provide useful in trying to make scientifically backed pro-vaccination sites more appealing to those wary of vaccines. Anti-vaccination or low vaccination rates in general are a very prominent issue in our current COVID-19 pandemic.

The book also delves into the topic of treating pandemic related emotional distress. During pandemics, even our current one, a lack of mental health, social support systems and mental health professionals can be linked to a higher probability of people developing emotional and psychological problems. The book states that a proactive response to this issue is necessary, including a rapid assessment of outbreak-associated psychological stressors. What has been seen to occur is that medical health practitioners, who are evidently under a lot of stress themselves in a pandemic situation, often fail to detect psychological disorders. A method must therefore be developed in order to more easily and effectively detect individuals who are seen or believed to suffer from medically significant distress. Furthermore, procedures for selecting optimal interventions must also be developed. Taylor mentions the screen-and-treat approach here. A very prominent example of this method is a mental health programme that was instituted following the 2005 London bombings to primarily help treat PTSD. The services were provided free of charge and a 24/7 helpline was established. Callers were then referred to a screening team. People who screened positive were then asked to complete a more in-depth evaluation with a clinician. Further actions were then taken given the individual's specific needs (Brewin 2008). Of course, implementing such a service for a more localised, yet, of course, tragic, event such as the London bombings is more manageable than a similar service that would have to be made available worldwide during a pandemic. The main lesson that can be drawn from this example is that mental health services such as this have been previously implemented and proven to be of positive use to society. Subsequently, more attention and effort need to be placed on developing an effective strategy for mental health screenings during events such as our current COVID-19 pandemic.

This book applies directly to the topic of this issue: *Generation Corona*. Psychological analysis such as that described in this book can, for one, be applied to the current young generation. The findings can help governments better understand the younger generations' beliefs, fears and worries, and therefore enable them to adapt their strategies and actions accordingly. The book and similar research could also be a vital asset to aid the current young generation in being better prepared for possible future pandemics. Even if science is continually advancing in this field, human psychology tends to remain rather constant. So, people will probably react and act similarly in the future as they do now.

Having lived through two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, one can congratulate the author on his accurate predictions. We saw that the pandemic increased the need to provide psychological support for people with behaviours and personality traits linked to maladaptive reactions during the pandemic. Providing a sense of stability even during the pandemic, reactions to alternative behaviours and cognitive-behavioural therapy in higher-risk cases proved necessary as a response to the psychological needs of people around the world, while, especially with a vaccine available, it

remains difficult to improve health-promoting behaviours such as vaccine adherence, especially for people such as health care workers. It becomes obvious that conspiracy theories are nothing unusual but instead, a reality one has to face in any extreme situation. However, one wonders whether this book should not be considered outdated, since it was outlived by the experiences during the pandemic and science has already substantially advanced on many topics discussed here. This is certainly the case with regard to this pandemic, and as ever more recent literature is being published, it becomes increasingly unattractive to go back to the scientific status quo ante. The advantages of reading this short book can be summed up with two arguments. First of all, the oversight this book offers, combined with the general approach, still makes this book elementary literature that remains a good starting point into the psychology surrounding pandemics, which of course lacks the specific scientific advances made during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Secondly, as mentioned previously, this book was written before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The book therefore draws upon previous pandemics and epidemics that sometimes played out quite differently in order to inform and reinforce its messages, so that the information provided can be considered rather a template where general strategies against pandemics can only be analysed on a broad scale. One therefore has to acknowledge that this book is a general approach to pandemics that is informative when it comes to general discussions on pandemic-related psychology, but lacks the advances and more importantly, the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic; such as the fact that the isolation of children during the lockdowns might have huge secondary effects. Lastly, on a rather political note, this book reminds us that predictions and precautionary measures are indeed possible; since it proves that a lot of challenges could be anticipated. The excuse of unpredictability is therefore not entirely valid. This train of thought should give way to working towards more future-oriented policies.

Overall, *The Psychology of Pandemics* is a book that provides an outline of the course of pandemics before COVID-19, while at the same time highlighting behavioural and psychological factors that require attention from psychologists and health care workers. Even further, this book highlights the need to be prepared not just for the current pandemic, but for other pandemics that may occur in the future (and which are considered to be very likely).

The book is written in an accessible style with clear structure and conclusions after each chapter. The main statements are largely unchallenged even after comparing them to the reality of this pandemic. One can even go so far as to interpret the unique distance of this book to everyday pandemic politics to be a refreshingly unpoliticised view on communication and psychology during a pandemic, although one has to keep in mind that this book might be superseded rather sooner than later by updated literature.

Taylor's book can therefore be considered one of the most influential books of this pandemic and represents a catalyst for further critical discussions on the psychological impact of pandemics.

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Berlin Demography Days 2022: “Youth in Demographic Change” (16-18 May 2022)

Reported by Anne Bierwirth, Noah Croitoru and Milena Kühlsheimer

At the Berlin Demography Days 2022, international experts in demography as well as political and social science discussed current issues of demographic change and their effects on the youth. For three days, several challenges in this field were addressed, focusing mainly on population development in Germany on the first day and Europe on the second, while opening up the perspective to global questions on the last day of the conference.

The public panel event was attended by students from seven European school classes and, among others, Dubravka Šuica, Vice-President of the European Commission for Democracy and Demography, Hermann Gröhe, Member of the German Bundestag, Christa Katharina Spieß, Director of the Federal Institute for Population Research, as well as Sabine Walper, Director of the German Youth Institute. The discussion forums of the Berlin Demography Days were held online, while the public panel event took place on-site at the WissenschaftsForum Berlin.

As in the previous years, the event was organised by Diakonie Deutschland and Population Europe, the network of leading European research institutions in the field of population sciences, in cooperation with the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Home Affairs and the Federal Ministry of Health as well as international partners.

Under the motto “Youth in Demographic Change”, the Berlin Demography Days considered general topics of intergenerational justice, youth policy strategies and chances for political participation; and it thereby tackled questions such as: What moves younger people and what are their future prospects in an aging society? What are the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and is the youth resilient? How important are the earlier years in one's life for the following course of life?

These big questions and ideas were bundled into four major conference themes, namely “younger people's voice in politics”, “younger people and the life course”, “attitudes, aspirations and crisis resilience” and “policies supporting younger people”.

The contributions dedicated to “young people's voices in politics” aimed to make visible the potential for conflict and power disparities between generations. Despite engaging in large-scale activism, most popularly as part of the struggle against climate change, young people face exclusion from political participation by the demographically stronger older generations. As the population is aging, political decision-making is dominated by this older generation. Herein lies a considerable risk for conflict between youth and their elders. Social cohesion, however, depends on the avid political participation of youth alongside older age groups. Therefore, it is crucial to analyse how political participation and involvement can be made more accessible for young people.

Both in questions of participation, as well as in considerations of “attitudes, aspirations and crisis resilience”, socio-demographic diversities among young people play a defining role. The pandemic has affected young people deeply in several aspects of their life, the short- and long-term consequences of which need to be studied. What needs to be resolved, furthermore, is how to successfully implement support for young people in managing their fears and expectations. After all, these fears and expectations have certainly impacted young people's attitudes throughout the pandemic.

Not only these internalities but also external factors define “young people and the course of life”. Here, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic converges with a development that has been observed well before the pandemic: the shift from linear courses of life toward non-linear biographies riddled with changes in education and occupation until retirement. Young people today experience increasing uncertainties in their prospects for the future.

The challenges youth face, analysed in all of the conferences' four thematic areas, converge and must be addressed through “policies supporting younger people”, as is the title of the final thematic area. This support must be made accessible to all and take into account the diversities within the heterogeneous “young generation”. Here, the crucial question emerges on how political decision-making can ensure the efficacy of political support for young people.

Against the backdrop of these topics and considerations, more than 50 international experts from politics, academia and society discussed developments in Germany, Europe and worldwide together with young people on three consecutive afternoons.

On the first day of the Berlin Demography Days, Professor Jörg Tremmel, founder and board member of the Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations, gave his keynote address on “attitudes, aspirations and crisis resilience”.

Tremmel opened his lecture by laying out the current setting: the COVID-19 pandemic itself has hit the elderly the hardest, while the youth suffered the most from the political response to it. There was a political trade-off between curbing the spread of the pandemic and closing down public life. This trade-off was managed differently by different states, as was shown in the comparison of how six European states mitigated the pandemic politically. All decisions made, regardless of the supporting political agenda, had and continue to have effects both within a generation and between generations. Referring to an OECD brief, Tremmel stressed again the drastic and disproportional effect the COVID-19 pandemic and its management had on youth internationally. Youth organisations in OECD states express concerns about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on all aspects of life, most crucially mental health, education and employment. As Tremmel specified, these concerns reflect the intergenerational discrepancies that the pandemic and its mitigation exacerbated, as well as the growing intragenerational inequalities that affect the youth as a heterogeneous group.

In these terms, Tremmel concluded, there is evidence that a “Generation Corona” exists; it is a group of young people, spanning two birth cohorts, that received less education, fewer opportunities to build social relationships and less internationalisation. Nonetheless, young people’s resilience and capacity to deal with crises and the scars they leave will only become apparent in the coming years. To support youth in tapping into these capacities, an evaluation through the direct involvement of those most affected should be conducted to then develop policies that support youth holistically.

Doreen Siebern timer, a representative of the German Education Union, also called for policy support in her comment on Tremmel’s keynote. Particularly the education sector plays a significant role here. Siebern timer agreed that the pandemic worsened pre-existing intragenerational divergences and exacerbated educational inequalities among young people. The lack of adequate digitalisation and training left the German school system drained and forced educators to compensate for the missing infrastructure. The system requires more financing, Siebern timer stated, to mitigate ongoing negative developments that the pandemic only exacerbated and that deeply impact educators and students alike.

The keynote address for the conference theme “Youth in course of life” was delivered by Professor Klaus Hurrelmann of Hertie School. He presented three theses on how the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the perspectives and plans youth have for their ongoing course of life. In his opening remarks, Hurrelmann stated that the life perspectives of young people differ greatly

from the perspectives of older generations. Youth face a structural disadvantage compared to the older generation that outnumbers them. This older generation grew up with better perspectives on their future, whereas today’s youth experienced a cascade of crises – from 9/11 over COVID-19 to the Ukraine war – that resulted in a persisting sense of uncertainty. In addition to this intergenerational discrepancy, which Jörg Tremmel and Doreen Siebern timer had also highlighted, there is an increasing intragenerational gap between those who coped better with the pandemic and were able to hone new skills required in the novel circumstances and those who were not able to keep up and now experience deficiencies in education, social life and societal participation. Which of the two groups a young person falls into is strongly dependent on their family background. The group of disadvantaged youth grew from around 25% to 30% and lost further ground to more advantaged groups. Together, these factors form a risk of a widening gap between those more and those less affected by the pandemic, both intergenerationally, as well as intragenerationally. Based on these observations, Hurrelmann called for increasing involvement and more accessible participation of young people, both as a generation as well as on the level of individuals.

In their respective comments on Hurrelmann’s contributions, Susanne Keuchel, Head of the German Federation for Arts Education, and Georg Pirker from the Association of German Educational Organizations pointed to the potential and the capacities of the young generation and the ways youth can make effective use of their resources during and after the pandemic. Keuchel added that the now rapidly advancing digitalisation in Germany opens up new questions around privacy, transparency, knowledge and misinformation that young people deal with, but which simultaneously helps them to develop new skills. In general, Keuchel noted that the young generation is diverse and resourceful, able to deal with crises and to draw additional skills from them. Similarly, Pirker advised trusting in the capabilities of young people and their adaptability to the present. He added that financial heritage must also be taken into account as a resource, as young people are the generation that will inherit large sums from the older generations, who outnumber them. On the other hand, Pirker warned that the increasing economisation of all aspects of life and the subsequent rising pressure to perform well in education and the workforce, despite any given external conditions, might prove a challenge for the young generation, despite its potential.

The various contributions from high-level experts made it abundantly clear that youth in Germany, Europe and the world are concerned with their health and their chances at success in education or work in an increasingly and globally uncertain context. The pandemic and the actions taken to curb its spread have left scars, particularly on the younger generation as the group most affected by the implemented measures; and only the coming years will show how well young people and society will deal and heal. The discussions at the Demography Days demonstrated that young people are resourceful and resilient, but that the impact of the COVID-19 crisis defines a generation, at least for today.

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