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**“ I WOULD N’ T WANT TO BE  
QUARANTINED AGAIN ” / “ I WOULD  
LIKE TO HAVE QUARANTINE AGAIN ”**

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON YOUNG  
PEOPLE LIVES IN LITHUANIA

INSIGHT REPORT

## Introduction

The Lithuanian people experienced the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, as did the whole world. In the framework of the CONTINUE project, we will present the pandemic effect on Lithuania's youth, to be more specific, youth living in Vilnius, aged 15-29.

The young people we have been talking to have very different experiences: some saw only the negative side of the pandemic, some saw the positive parts which came unexpectedly together with the pandemic, some told about both sides of their COVID-19 experience. But there are some common feelings that were applicable mostly for all: the hopeless feeling of not knowing what is going on and when will it end, the fear of coronavirus, the fear to get sick with coronavirus, the fear of infecting your loved ones, the fear to meet people in general, missing in-person socialization. However, they were some of the immediate impacts, however we are now seeing some of the longer term impacts after living with COVID-19 for so long. These range from very negative, including anxiety, anger, depression, boredom, lack of motivation to do anything, to the more positive aspects such as getting to know themselves better, discovering the benefits of the pandemic, starting to use those benefits in their lives, using free time more wisely, adapting to the changes and even changing their lifestyles in some healthy ways.

### **“I felt really a bit lonely” – Lack of communication with friends**

One of the most common feelings during the COVID-19 pandemic for youth was the lack of real-life communication with their peers. It was mentioned the most frequently out of any other impacts:

- “All in all, that sociality disappeared, I became more introverted. ... In general, there was generally less communication than in the present.”
- “I lacked a lot of communication I would say and I felt really a bit lonely because I couldn't meet someone so normally, to communicate.”
- “It was hard to get used to the same borders and little communication. ... For that, I no longer have full communication 'talent' and I find it very difficult to communicate with people.”

- "It was very difficult because of that lack of communication, but later I became more focused and easier to control myself. ... The main problem during the pandemic was the lack of communication for me personally, but I think so for most teenagers."
- "When it started, I felt very weird because all the social life just got cut off and I needed to spend the whole time at my house."
- "During the quarantine, it was strange to sit at home and not go anywhere, I thought I would go crazy."

The lack of communication affected almost everyone just to a different extent but there has been a lot of research on the impact of isolation for youth it is frequently mentioned that when young people are developing, socializing is crucial as it is part of their growth as people. The youth itself also stress socialization with their peers as having a very important role in their lives. While it could be said that for Generation Z, there are very good in communication technologies to make it easier for them to adapt to lockdown, these were not really a substitute for a physical social life. There were mentioned some tools such as Skype and Discord, but it was also said that "it was very bad to communicate" like that so there could be the assumption that online communication cannot replace physical interaction.

### **"I became lazy" – Lack of motivation during the pandemic**

The second very common sign of the pandemic effect was laziness and lack of motivation. One of the young people who told their story said, "I found myself very much, I started watching myself less, I didn't leave home almost, I became lazy." And even though those people liked "to walk in the woods with friends, go outside" normally, they couldn't do that during lockdown and that lead to the very narrow and "lazy" activities at home like laying "in bed all day" and watching "all kinds of series, movies," and playing "computer games". "Nothing more," one young person said.

This state of being has also affected learning in school. Moving to online platforms was quite a shock to many institutions and schools weren't any exception. As mentioned above, youth were lacking what they needed for communication and not

all of the teachers tried to help with that: "for example, the teachers didn't explain anything to me, I had to find out everything myself or I was just lazy," said one of the young people. Another said, "I couldn't concentrate normally, I didn't have the motivation to learn so much." At such a young age it's difficult to maintain discipline and to keep learning, especially when no one is watching. What is more, there were some actions of cheating and for some, their "grades may have suffered as well." Of course, this wasn't the case for everyone:

"I am an independent person, it was quite easy to find out some topics, I am learning quite well, there were no learning difficulties. But still, if you compare distance learning and contact, it is clear that contact is better because there is that communication at school and with classmates."

So there is quite clear again, that in all spheres of life communication comes back as a key point helping youth to be more motivated and event to focus.

### **“The future is completely mine to live in” – Finding the positives in more free time**

One of the young people we spoke to said, "The only positive thing that was, that [there was] more free time". Of course, that wasn't the main point for the majority of youth, and the pandemic was seen as a very negative thing for some. But it is clear from the stories that many young people used their additional free time positively:

- "The first quarantine gave a little motivation to train (dancing) at home, to be more with myself."
- "Not only did I sit at home, but I also went for a walk, doing various jobs for which I had not found time before ... This time has brought benefits to the completion of everything I had not done before. For example, I cooked, watched series, played sports, and much more."
- "I started to like nature even more, because I spent more and more time outdoors."

- "I had to buy some books, some puzzles to solve. ... I spent so much time focusing on my career ... and focusing on my career was a great experience because it had a huge impact on my education because I was spending so much time for studying for my classes."

For some people, that free time gave the opportunity to find where do they want to be, what do they want to do, meet new and interesting people and also find new opportunities while adapting to the online world:

- "I found my current job and due to pandemic conditions I was able to work there remotely [as it is in another city] ... it was hard, but also a period which brought good things, because I met some people who are very important to me, I found a job that I love and found new activities which I enjoy."
- "And by the time I was alone, a lot had changed in my life. At that time, I realized that I did not want to be in Vilnius, I wanted to return to live in Kaunas, somewhere closer to nature. So I did that - I moved to Kaunas, changed my life completely upside down."
- "I also learned how to work remotely ... it's enjoyable and it increases your effectiveness and in general mood, because you can be in cool places and still work as you would do from home."
- "It really made one big thing easier ... Pandemic taught us that many events, seminars, courses, training can be held online and you can connect to it from anywhere".

So, for some people that free time in quarantine gave them a chance to change their life and they used it. That shows that no matter the circumstances (as it was pretty much the same for everyone in the country), you can do much more than you think if you find motivation to change your life to way you want it to be.

Of course, it may be easy to say because dealing with uncertainty is difficult, dealing with your emotions is difficult and the only person who can help you the most is you. If you don't want changes in your life, no one will make you do anything. There is a story of one young man:

"It affected me very badly because I was super depressed. ... That risk of dying was really affecting me in a bad way ... There is a thing with me when I am doing nothing, I become more angry about life. When I do not like my life, I start to be more angry towards almost everything. ... To deal with that I had to buy some books, some puzzles to solve and what did I do? I spent so much time focusing on my career which had a really good impact on my life. ... I realised that during those times to deal with anger and depression I started to be a philosopher, I guess. Cause I was thinking so much about depth, life and I started to think about the meaning of life ... You become vulnerable both - to the Covid and also you become vulnerable to the bad thoughts ... Right now I am thinking like the future is completely mine to live in, so those COVID times, the things that I did, affected me in a good way as well. I am more optimistic for now, more than pessimistic".

It can be the main message to all the youth – for them to understand that they are responsible for the life they live themselves.

## **Key findings**

The key learnings from the stories are:

- Communication: even though young generation know how to use technologies, it can not replace real-life conversations and socializing, it is crucial to their development.
- Lack of motivation: it is hard for young people to keep themselves motivated for a long time. That also showed that connection with other people also helps them with that – to stay focused and motivated. We could call it the "community effect".
- Free time: for some it gives freedom to relax and do nothing, which can lead into difficult emotional state or even physical diseases, and for others it is the opportunity to take their life into their hands and reach for what they want.

## About CONTINUE

CONTINUE supports young people experiencing social exclusion to tackle the specific challenges of post-COVID times in terms of staying connected and integrated into European communities. The project is being delivered by a consortium of 8 NGOs from different European countries who are experienced in youth education and community based activities. The work involves storytelling, social action projects, policy development, knowledge exchanges, an outreach campaign and the creation of an online platform.

As part of this project, Community Reporting activities are being delivered with young people across Europe to explore their experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic and what can support them as part of the COVID-19 recovery period. This learning will be used in the CONTINUE project to kick-start social actions led by the young people in their communities. Community Reporting is a digital storytelling movement founded by People's Voice Media and supports people to tell their own stories, in their own ways in order to catalyse change within processes, policy and practice. You can find out more here: <https://peoplesvoicemedia.co.uk>

This insight report has been produced by ASOCIACIJA "AKTYVUS JAUNIMAS (ACTIVE YOUTH ASSOCIATION) and is based on 12 from young people living in VILNIUS, LITHUANIA. All of the stories from young people that have been gathered on the project can be listened to here: <https://communityreporter.net/continue>

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