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“I FEARED THAT I MIGHT INFECT
HER WITH THE VIRUS.”

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON YOUNG
PEOPLE IN BERLIN

INSIGHT REPORT

Introduction

As with many of cities in Germany, Berlin had a challenging time during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently the government is talking about the possibility of a 4th lockdown which not only brings back memories of the prior lockdowns and, most significantly, of the first lockdown, but also comes with frustration and despair.

The residents of Berlin – having had many freedoms during all lockdowns – nevertheless found creative ways to manage their everyday life, despite several restrictions. Our peer group – young Berliners who are between the age 20 – 27 – reveal through their stories how they have experienced the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, and unexpectedly enough, many told us about positive moments in which they even enjoyed slowing down on life and used the time to focus on themselves more than usual. However, they also spoke about mental health issues and a general rise in domestic violence.

“I can cook lasagne now. ... It's quite a big accomplishment for me.” – Positive aspects of the pandemic

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our peer group can be divided into positive and negative outcomes.

Positive aspects included the fact that many felt that they had more time for themselves, which they used to be more creative (be it through cooking, baking or by creating art in general). One participant proudly told us “I can cook lasagne now. That would have been impossible before the lockdown. It's quite a big accomplishment for me.”

Others felt that they could connect a lot better with their friends. The one-on-one meetings gave their friendships more room to grow in depth as they became “more emotionally invested with them.”

They were happy that they could consume less and, thus, save money. This led to a rethinking of their consumer behaviour and a strong emphasis on sustainability.

One participant had a very positive outlook on saving money saying: "Now, with the borders open I can use my savings to travel. I have already been to Lisbon and it was great to be able to do that." Another added: "I saw that I do not need to buy more clothes – I have so many already!"

They also enjoyed taking care of the community and helping out elders with, for example, their shopping. This also led to an understanding of protecting vulnerable people from getting the disease.

"It broke my heart not being able to be close to her during this awful time." – Negative aspects of the pandemic

However, there were also down sides to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many felt that politics had failed them, which in some led to critically questioning the current government and its actions.

Looking into an unpredictable future jobwise was something that made many especially uncomfortable as they felt like they could not plan for anything. While no one in our peer group lost their job, many told stories of how their friends were dismissed from their jobs. It hit hardest those who were working in the food service industry and retail.

The rising number of deaths made many fear for their grandparents, whom most of them – in case of an emergency – would not be able to visit or even go to their funeral. One participant said:

"My grandmother broke her hip during the pandemic and there was no possibility for me to help her, because I feared that I might infect her with the virus. It is a miracle that she recovered well from her surgery. But it broke my heart not being able to be close to her during this awful time."

The general distance to, in particular, older family members had led to a lot of negativity in the lives of many young people, especially those from immigrant communities. One participant mentioned that some of her friends suffered from mild depression and that the lockdown isolated them.

There was also concern for the vaccine. Many of our participants did not trust the vaccine in the first place and did not want to be vaccinated. However, they felt pressured into getting vaccinated as they understood that “this is how [they] will gain [their] freedom back.”

Key findings

The pandemic has been challenging for many young people, however they have gained a new view-point on their own life, on their own community (family and friends) but also developed a more sensitive understanding of the community in general. Who are vulnerable people in our society and how can we help or improve their situation? What can I do as a young person? In general – though challenging at times – the young people told stories of positivity and having had a relatively good time during the pandemic.

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 COMPARATIVE RESEARCH NETWORK (CRN) and is based on 12 young people living in GERMANY. All of the stories from young people that have been gathered on the project can be listened to here: <https://communityreporter.net/continue>

C O N T I N U E



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Crossing Borders

