



Young people with disabilities in times of COVID-19

Report
December 2020



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Young People with disabilities in times of COVID-19 (réponses)

The Youth Committee is an advisory governing body of EDF. It is composed of eight members, young people aged 18 to 35, representing all categories of disability and coming from all over Europe. It is chaired by one of its members, who is supported by one of the Executive member and by a staff from the secretariat to achieve its plans. The Youth Committee is devoted to representing the interests of young persons with disabilities – within the EDF and throughout Europe.

The current Youth Committee members are introduced below, with photos supplied by the committee members:



“If you ever need someone to speak or to ask questions about young disabled people and our rights, don't hesitate to reach out to us (both the EDF Youth Committee and the secretariat). We will be happy to get in touch. I love reading books and immerse myself in another people's lives or even another worlds. Comics can be a great idea too”

- Kamil Goungor, from Greece, Chair of the Youth Committee



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“Engaging at the local, national and global levels is always worthwhile and rewarding for young people, all the more so for youth with disabilities who can bring in new concepts and fresh perspectives as well as pave the way to wider cooperation and better opportunities for everybody in an inclusive society. What supported me during lockdown: to take care of myself, i.e. doing activities for which I couldn’t find the time before the COVID-19 pandemic: e.g. doing gymnastics, reading books, watching TV series. to take care of relationships. It is important not to forget to nurture them. In fact, the feeling of closeness (even though virtual) with my dear ones and friends helped me through this complicated time.”

- Francesca Sbianchi, from Italy



“Marianne, my co worker and I, believe that Leaving no one behind and pulling through together have always been at the heart of what it means to be human. Now more than ever, it is vital for us all to remember the power which we can all harness towards a better world when we team up with others. Thus, What keeps us going these days is to realise that we will all have to rebuild the future anew. To do just that means that we will have to rebuild a more inclusive and fairer world, which means that the world of tomorrow will be full of opportunities for us all to grab and to shape the best we will be able to. in doing so, it will also be extremely important to ensure that we will be able to leave a fairer, more prosperous, caring, confident and open-minded world for future generations to enjoy.”

- Mathieu Chatelin, from France



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“Always remember to keep us in the loop because we, the youth with disabilities, are also a part of the society and we are willing to build an inclusive society as well. To fix our disability is not what we want from society but to live as equal with other citizens. Breathe and take a look at where you are now. Is there something you have missed to do before? To have a phone call with your long old friends? To look for pictures you have taken while traveling from a few years ago? To try a new game you have always wanted to purchase? Here is your opportunity to catch.”

- Liisa Halonen, from Finland



“I would like to say to other young people with disabilities is that you matter! We all matter during these strange times. What I practice every day, is finding something I'm thankful for, especially for my hobbies. I also try to find something I'm grateful for about COVID! Even if it can be really hard some days.”

- Sigrídur Fossberg Thorlacius, from Iceland



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“Communicate openly about your disability and what makes it easier for you, it might make it easier for the people around you as well. Be outdoors whenever possible, disc golf is a low threshold and easy social distancing outdoor activity that can be done together.”

- Victor Rehn from Iceland



“In these difficult uncertain times the most vulnerable people ever are the most affected, but we were able to demonstrate that is always possible to stay stronger together. The life we use to live only relied on conventions that can be dismantled. We have to fight harder to make our voices listened as to get our rights is harder now than ever The lockdown allowed me to find out a part of myself I didn't know. I kept myself committed in interesting activities. Be your best friend however the circumstances are and you will never be alone.”

- Erika Becerra, from Italy, living in the UK



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“I'd like to tell all of you out there that however these last couple of weeks and months have been, how hard or how easy, how exhausting or rewarding – it's ok. Focusing on all the things, big and small, that are good each and every single day, be it a ray of sunshine or a nice post on Instagram. These are complicated, scary times, all feelings are valid and to look for these positive spotlights does help me a lot.”

- Dominique de Marné, from France



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The report

To learn more about the experience of young people with disabilities around Europe during the crisis, and their state governments' response to the situation, the European Disability Forum Youth Committee conducted a survey after the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. This report gives details on the findings from the survey, focusing on education, work and social aspects of the lives of young persons with disabilities. The findings were analysed and compiled with Claudia Coveney, Early-Stage Researcher of the Disability Advocacy Research in Europe (DARE) project.

Background: The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 had led to a national lockdown in the majority of countries in Europe. It is known that these measures had a severe impact on populations of persons with disabilities around the continent but available information on the lived experience of these people has been limited. Many national governments have withheld or scarcely produced information and statistics about the impact of these lockdowns on the lives of persons with disabilities. It is also known the experience of young people during the pandemic and state responses has been unique – many found their education interrupted, as well as their plans for work and leisure activities.

Results: Responses were received from Belgium, Iceland, Italy, Germany, Greece, Malta, Spain and the UK. 62% of respondents identified as women and 38% as men.

Age groups range from 13-18, 18-25 and 25-35. A majority of the respondents (43%) fell into the oldest age bracket. 38% were between 18-25 and 19% were between 13-18. 65% of the respondents lived with their parents, 30% lived in their own home, and the remaining 5% lived in a supported facility or another type of accommodation. 20% of the respondents said they received support services, and 80% did not.

Respondents were asked about how the pandemic impacted their lives in terms of access to support, social life, education, employment, and physical and mental wellbeing.

Of those receiving support, all but one respondent said that their support continued through the period of confinement, and all respondents said that their support was fully reinstated after the confinement period.

68% of respondents said that they were participating in some form of formal or non-formal education – 32% were not. Of those who were in some form of education, answers of what



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type included secondary school, college, university degrees, internships, and training programs in fashion and photography. When the period of lockdown began, most respondents answered that their education programs continued remotely on platforms like Microsoft Teams and deadlines were extended for submissions. Only 33% of respondents were able to return to their original education settings when the lockdown period ended. For the rest, their programs had either ended during the lockdown period or continued in a virtual setting. For those respondents who could not return, 27% were under 18.

On the topic of leisure, 40% of the respondents said they partook in some form of activity. These activities included dancing, sailing, theatre, swimming, drawing lessons, exercise groups, youth clubs and bands. 45% of respondents switched to a different form of activity during the lockdown period. These included gardening, walking, drawing, watching films.

57% of respondents said that they were employed. Job descriptions included project manager, kitchen assistant, translator, lecturer, research assistant, child minder, IT support personnel and more. 70% of those with jobs were able to continue remotely through the lockdown. Others responded that they were fired, furloughed or simply unable to continue through lockdown. Of those continuing, 26% said that the adjustments to their work for remote work was insufficient. Others commented that their workplaces were accommodating and supportive.

With regards to wellbeing, 68% of respondents said that the pandemic period had had an impact on their mental health. When asked to explain, respondents spoke about stress, isolation, anxiety and depression.

The survey asked respondents to rank out of 10 their level of mental health before, during and after the lockdown, and the results are displayed below in Figure 1. The figure shows three lines on a chart – an orange line, displaying scores out of 10 before the confinement period, yellow showing during and green showing after the confinement period. The most notable changes are the increase in 'low' scores during the lockdown – the yellow line. A majority (66%) of respondents reported their mental health decreasing or dipping over the lockdown period.



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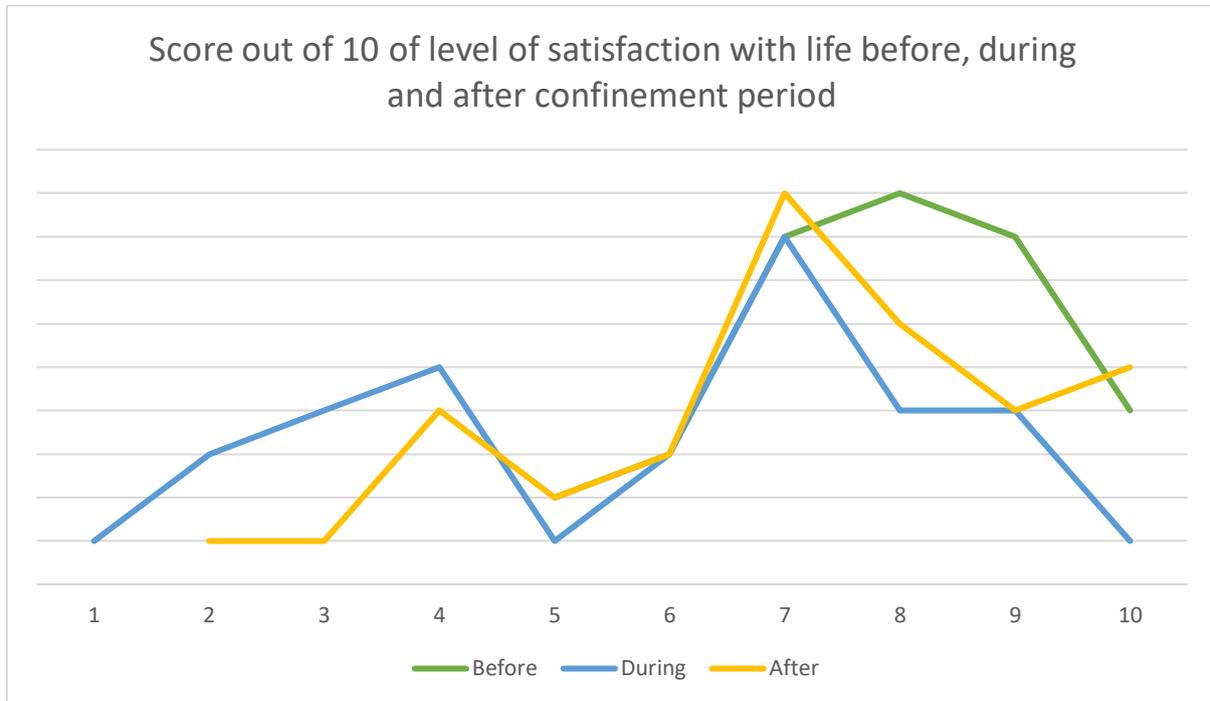


Figure 1. Graph tracking levels of satisfaction with life of survey respondents

When asked how their life had changed since the period of lockdown, some responses were related to the practical changes to routine, others about restricted contact with friends and family, changes in financial situations and stability, and also about changes in perspective and priorities. To the question of whether they felt any fear about the future, respondents described concerns about attending school, seeing friends, lack of leisure activities, and general isolation. When queried about feeling hope for the future, responses were overwhelmingly positive.

Most survey respondents described this as a temporary period of difficulty, but one that would pass in some way. Looking to the future, when asked what they advise an influential person from their local authority, country, etc, to do differently for you and others in your situation, answers centred mostly around government officials putting physical and mental health first, and communicating with honesty and transparency, and ensuring the accessibility of education and support services for everyone who needs them.

Finally, respondents were asked to give three pieces of advice to other young people to navigate such uncertain times. These varied, but were mostly connected to the themes of seeking professional help when needed, accepting emotional support from family and friends,



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and finding leisure activities that were suitable in the conditions. We leave you with a list of the recommended tips given by respondents for living through a confinement period, along with some direct quotes from respondents.

- Leisure activities like reading, listening to music, watching Netflix, and video games
- Healthy eating – or just practice your favourite meals
- Planning your time and having a routine
- Mindfulness and finding pleasure in little things
- Taking up a new hobby - look for indoor hobbies like sewing, online chess or scrabble
- Learn something new. Take online courses in things that interest you.
- Video calls with friends and family – don't be afraid of reaching out to people when you need it
- Have online dinner get-togethers
- Spend some time in the garden
- Take some time outside, if restrictions allow - stay active (physically) as much as possible.

“Hope and courage from my parents”

“A great circle of friends who remained in contact throughout the lockdown”

“Getting professional help”

“Adding a skill to your CV is important AND you learn something new!”

“Indoor leisure activities, professional help, support from family and friends”

“Make what you like, for example I cooked a lot - I read a lot and I went on you tube to see films, followed bloggers”

“Series, distracting myself with school work, family and enjoying time with them even if its just by watching a movie or playing cards”