

Youth Courage Final Conference

Mental Wellbeing of Young People in the Aftermath of COVID-19

European Economic & Social Committee, Rue Van Maerlant 2, Room VMA23, Brussels

Wednesday 15 May 2024, 10:00 - 14:00 | In person & Online

#YouthCourage | #EUBlueDeal | #EESCPartnership | #EESC | #EuropeanMentalHealthWeek

Youth Courage project has been a KA2 project funded by **Erasmus+** and targets marginalised young people who have lost access to key support systems due to the Covid-19 pandemic and seek to reconnect by focusing on the mental well-being of young people in Europe. The project aims to support and reintegrate these young people, while providing youth work professionals with appropriate tools. The project offers modern, future-proof ways to (re)connect with marginalised young people who have lost contact with their support system in times of crisis. It empowers adolescents and marginalised young people to become active citizens, to take responsibility for their own physical and mental health and aims to promote their personal development through solidarity and civic participation. It provides innovative survey tools to capture the current situation of marginalised youth and their caregivers in transnational reports to further strengthen the link with policymakers and research centres across Europe.

As a first step (Project Result 1), the project partners conducted a **survey** focusing on young people and the difficulties and obstacles to their economic and social lives that they face in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. In parallel with the young people, youth service professionals and volunteers were also interviewed in each country to get a complete picture of the situation. Together with the national desktop research, the results are compiled into [a transnational report](#) and translated into all partner languages through video summaries.

The second step (Project Result 2) was to set up **an online resource collection** that can be used on two levels. Youth workers can access the [online platform](#) to search for materials needed for their situation. This platform was developed in close cooperation with the target group of marginalised youth and is freely accessible so that partners and external youth workers can contribute and share their best practices. In addition, the partnership organised a learning, teaching, and training activity (LTTA) with all representatives of the target groups, together with a test phase in all project countries.

The project next developed a **two-level Escape Game** (Project Result 3) that can be easily implemented in non-formal settings and aims to increase young people's self-confidence and sense of self-efficacy. They are closely involved in the development process, train their social skills in a team, and experience a sense of success, responsibility and cooperation that enables them to overcome other challenges in their lives. The game is published digitally as a complete package on the [project website](#) in all project languages.

The final step (Project Result 4) **aims to intensify the cooperation between policymakers (local and regional), research institutions and youth workers in the field.** The project team has conducted the research of the initial survey findings, to update the results and draw conclusions on how the situation has changed. The project result will also include the experiences and lessons learned during the implementation of the project and make links to the situation in the project countries and at EU level. It will look to the future and make recommendations on how policy and decision makers can think about young people beyond the school context.

The current situation of young people shows very clearly that life before the pandemic - unsurprisingly - tended to be easier for them and has been turned upside-down in many aspects during the peaks of the pandemic. A similar picture emerges from the survey of young people by the Belgian partner organisation, where most young people outside the EU were interviewed via an associated partner. Here, youth workers would not have expected that the feelings and attitudes towards life in the pandemic were basically surprisingly positive. However, there are also other observations: for many young people, a subjective deterioration of living conditions was noted - this is also not surprising - especially in Austria and Italy. In general, it appears that, at least in the empirical study with 409 young people across Europe, there are country-specific and regional differences in how young people cope with the peaks of the pandemic in their everyday lives, whereby it can be speculated that this could perhaps be due to the cultural and social imprint, suitable support services, socio-economic backgrounds, degree of digitalisation and the handling of the pandemic management of the countries involved, without evaluating this in this context.

Overall, mental health seems to play a role for young people, with increased use of appropriate support. One young person indicated “because we were in lockdowns, none of the services were there. It increased the mental health problems, and now, they are only coming to the surface”. This is also confirmed by many youth workers. The project partners document that mental and psychological health has a very high to high priority among young people. However, it is questionable whether the initial definition of young people and professionals is the same. This was an initial consideration in the development of the questions.

On **15 May 2024**, the project will host the **final conference, in partnership with the European Economic and Social Committee**, where the policy paper will be presented to the public and with stakeholders. The [website](#) of the project shares further details. In this final conference, project partners will share the lessons learned throughout the project, and representatives of diverse stakeholders will be invited to draw attention to the mental wellbeing of young people from different perspectives, with the focus on the effect of the Covid-19 on marginalised young people. A particular attention will be given to climate anxiety, which is an emerging issue, recognised among many young people in Europe.

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Draft Agenda

- 10:00-10:15** **Welcome and registration**
- 10:15-10:30** **Opening Remarks**
- Piotr Sadowski, Secretary General, Volonteuropa, Belgium
 - René Halla, EU Projects Manager, Jugend Am Werk, Austria
- 10:30-11:30** **Panel discussion with Youth Courage project partners: “Lessons learned from the Youth Courage Project”**
- Carina Posch, Project Manager, Verein Auxilium, Austria
 - Davide Prette, European Projects Manager, Vol.To ETS – Volontariato Torino, Italy
 - Furkan Sorkuncuk, Project Coordinator, Volonteuropa, Belgium
 - Jennifer Smith, Meath Partnership, Ireland
 - René Halla, EU Projects Manager, Jugend Am Werk, Austria
- 11:30-11:45** **Comfort Break**
- 11:45-12:55** **Panel discussion: “Mental wellbeing of young people, an emerging issue across the EU”**
- Milena Angelova, Member, European Economic and Social Committee
 - Antonia Pichler, Coordinator of Psychosocial Support Services for Young People, Jugend Am Werk, Austria
 - Fatima Awil, Policy & Advocacy Officer, Mental Health Europe, Belgium (TBC)
 - Chiara Piccolo, Head of European Affairs, Learning for Wellbeing Foundation, Belgium
- 12:55-13:00** **Concluding remarks**
- Furkan Sorkuncuk, Project Coordinator, Volonteuropa, Belgium
- 13:00-14:00** **Networking lunch**