

GENERATION COVID-19: ANOTHER BRICK IN THE WALL?

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Abstract

The outbreak of a global pandemic related to Sars-Cov-2 also known as Coronavirus or COVID-19 since late 2019 and early 2020 has caused significant turnover in the everyday health, political, economic and social situation and behaviour of individuals as well as society. Despite the adoption of immediate measures from states and 21st Century medicine the pandemic shows the vulnerability of individuals and particular groups of society. That said, the consequences will be broad; not only those who suffer from direct disease consequences but we anticipate the associated difficulties following the post-pandemic development and impacts. In this paper we focus specifically on the political and social consequences of a pandemic towards youth policy, youth unemployment and education limits in promoting youth well-being.

Key words: *youth, COVID-19, youth unemployment, well-being*

INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of a COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed social and other standards of population as a whole including specific phenomena associated with pandemic management and crisis measures. The adoption of restrictions limiting citizens' rights and freedoms anticipating the need to protect global health have had, and will have long term consequences, specifically in a negative way. While there is an urgent need to save lives, protect economies and take care of elderly people since they constitute a vulnerable and fragile part of population, the same should be applied towards children and youth as drivers of future developments. Several studies have devoted their research to study the situation of children [6-12 years], adolescents [13-17 years] and young adults [18-24 years] as groups of population directly or indirectly affected by Coronavirus disease [CDC 2021; Leavey et al. 2020; OECD 2020]. Most of the research results include findings related to health issues, youth labour market consequences as well as their access to education and training. Young people, especially Generation Z and Generation Alpha but also including Generation Y, also known as Millennials, are facing unprecedented situations. Thus said, it is known that children and young people born between 1990 and 2005 have already faced another global shock during the economic crisis which escalated after 2008; now they are facing another crisis coupled by direct health risk exposure related to COVID-19 [OECD 2020]. Researchers and scholars are aware that such direct shocks and exposures to vulnerable groups of the population will have long-term consequences for their education [Molnářová, Rošteková 2020], career development as well as mental well-being. An important part of coping with these critical scenarios is the position of national and supranational governments to secure the future of children and young people to be able to cope with the transitions from post-pandemic developments and trajectories. Studies have already pointed to a very adverse impact, e.g. in the field of formal education, especially for children and young people. For example, in the case of the Slovak Republic, UNESCO states that government pandemic measures and restrictions have negatively affected 988,103 children and young people with approximately two-thirds of those affected in primary and secondary education [UNESCO 2020]. Thus said, almost one-fifth of the Slovak population has directly undergone the effects of the transition from the traditional form of education to distance learning which bring negative impacts on the development of children and youth, not only in basic literacy, socialisation or autonomy, but also in broader economic and social contexts including their positive trajectory towards active citizenship.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the pandemic and post-pandemic developments in the youth social, economic, political and health situation in relation to trends of youth policy making and their well-being. Since the category of youth constitute a vital part of each state population and the generation that will take part in political, economic and social leadership in the future, it is essential to assess and evaluate the impacts of a pandemic towards their well-being. We argue that the current position

of youth in the political, economic and social reality is not only an assumption of the current state of the pandemic situation of an individual, on the contrary, impacts of the pandemic and, especially after it, open a critical set of concerns about their future, access to education, job prospectives, health impacts and disruptions in everyday social interactions. This is what constitutes the major concerns in relation to children, adolescents and youth well-being. Again, as we stress, it is rather important to listen to this particular proportion of the global population, since direct interventions and actions aimed at children and youth will be essential to diminish the negative effects of a pandemic and to propose safeguards to guarantee better future scenarios for post-pandemic youth development.

1. GENERATION COVID-19¹

Current evidence shows that young people aged 12-24 are one of the groups most affected by the pandemic measures, resulting in economic and social impacts especially in terms of labour market and mental health outcomes [Leavay, Eastaugh, Kane 2020]. The authors declare that COVID-19 measures require many people to cope with a completely different way of life while struggling with the pandemic and its ensuing economic crisis. As a result of the ongoing measures needed to protect health, young people especially face persistent economic and social challenges that threaten their long-term health and well-being which ultimately impacts their foundations for adulthood transitions [Leavay, Eastaugh, Kane 2020].

The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally changed political [in terms of civic] and social standards and some phenomena associated with crisis measures and state management for society as a whole that will have major critical impacts even after the pandemic is over. Crisis outcomes cause critical scenarios not only in education, and health, but also in political socialisation, trust in political institutions or political leaders, also a wave of social awareness in the context of political communication and some conspiracy theories have a major impact on the value orientation of not only young people in relation to the democratic exercise of power. By way of illustration, the transition to distance forms of education has contributed to a deepening of inequalities in the education of children and young people while some of them had no or limited access to education. A Slovak study by the Institute for Educational Policy proves that more than 44% of children aged 6 to 11 live in overcrowded households and do not have the physical space to learn; an estimated 32,000 primary school pupils are without an internet connection, 40% of Roma children do not have internet access at all [Bednárík et al. 2020]. Overall, 7.5% of high school students were not involved in distance education and 18.5% were not educated online [Ostertágová, Čokyna 2020]. The findings of research conducted in Slovakia correlate with the conclusions presented in several available studies assessing the impact on education

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systems and the educated generation worldwide. For example, the effects of limited access to education on the overall mental state of youth are reported in a 2020 OECD study; a 2020 UNFPA study; and a 2020 ILO study dealing with the interconnection of the mental balance of young people [surviving anxiety and depression due to social isolation] with their civic activism in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which only confirms one of the starting points of the present research, namely that COVID-19 will have formative impacts on youth.

The above problems represent only a narrow set of complexities of the problem, the consequences of which will gradually manifest themselves over time. Many studies confirm the causal relationship between the level and quality of education toward the promotion of democracy: from democratic institutions and democratic processes through the preferences of democratically minded political parties [Gadarian, Goodman, Pepinsky 2020] to the overall level of confidence in the economy and society [Claasen 2019]. Failure in the educational process can thus lead to a chain reaction that will result in the strengthening of illiberal and authoritarian tendencies in society, an increase in populism and support for anti-system parties [Bol, Giani, Blais, Loewen 2020]. The lowering of the education level of the population will be reflected in the possible decline of political culture followed by a decline in political trust including political institutions, which will result in distrust in public policy and its individual sectors. The findings of this prior research create space for monitoring the consequences of a pandemic on specific groups of the population. An important factor influencing the value settings of contemporary youth is the level of their media literacy. It is a fact that young people spend the vast majority of their free time on social networks, which have become their main source of information. The problem in this case seems to be the inability to identify the relevant source of information, which makes them prone to trust the conspiracies and misinformation that often undermine the basic pillars of democracy.

According to a survey by the Focus agency for the Youth Council of Slovakia, only 16% of young people aged 15-24 verify the sources and up to a third of them incline to alternative websites that often spread hoaxes and misinformation. Such websites or social networking sites have long undermined young people's confidence in traditional media. It is alarming that, according to the survey, up to 83% of young people receive information from social media contributions [Youth Council of Slovakia 2019]. Facebook and Instagram thus significantly co-create the reality of young people and shape their value orientations. The COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to fear of an uncertain future, is causing an enormous increase in mistrust and conspiracies against which young people, due to a lack of media literacy are not sufficiently immune. This raises the question of whether hoaxes and misinformation have an impact on the support of democracy and its basic pillars by young people. As can be seen from the available studies, all of the above can be considered a trend that is as relevant in other countries around the world. Individual expert studies and research carried

out so far, in terms of identifying and examining the change that has taken place in all areas of each society affected by this epidemic, focus on partial issues depending on the scientific field. They identify areas where, after the end of the first lockdown, deterioration in young people's lives has been identified, in particular in areas such as the emotional state of young people in terms of impaired ability to concentrate and carry out daily activities, and identify key themes, namely mental health, housing, work, social relationships, creating and perceiving your future [Deckman, McDonald, Rouse, Kromer 2020]. From the perspective of the surveyed youth, studies have shown the complex and overlapping nature of the problems faced by young people, many of which were pre-pandemic [Generations X, Y, Z and Alpha] and were exacerbated by the crisis.

We believe that young people, as an extremely current and especially future political and civic constant of any political system, now require increased attention. The impact has also been observed at the territorial, political and governance dimensions of the crisis [Dodds et al. 2020]. The period between 15 and 24 years is a crucial period for building and maintaining relationships with family, friends and the wider community. Here, the results of recent studies have shown how important technologies are for them to build and maintain relationships during the lockdown and how much uncertainty they have about the future of society and their role in it [UK Youth 2020; Leavay, Eastaugh, Kane 2020; Polakovic 2020].

2. YOUTH POLICY AT ITS BEST?

Youth in general represents a specific category of the world's population which bears specific social and demographic characteristics. Youth can be understood as an age cohort ranging within 15-30 years of life. It is therefore the age at which individuals begin to accept themselves as full citizens [for example, obtaining an identity card], become young adults and formally activate their civil and political rights. At the same time, a youth is a person who is trying to access and obtain secondary and tertiary education, inclusion in the work life cycle and is considering establishing their own family. Macháček considers youth to be a sociological term "that allows a certain part of young people to be understood as an age-social group" [Macháček 2015: 36]. In addition to the above, young people represent a certain sociological group, age and socio-political cohort of young people, who are characterised by general, but especially specific biological-psychological, socio-economic and civic-political characteristics [Macháček 2015: 36-37]. It is important to distinguish that the youth category does not represent an aggregated mass; whether from an ideological, value, economic or social point of view. On the contrary, young people represent heterogeneous attitudes, preferences, diverse interests and forms of involvement in social and political life. However, age distinction alone does not stand up to the comparative perspective of nation states and international organisations. The United Nations [UN], for example, states that for statistical purposes it defines young people as persons between

the ages of 15 and 24, in compliance with the applicable national legislation [Secretary-General's Report to the General Assembly 1981; 1985]. Therefore, the age range of youth usually oscillates between 15 to 30 years of age.

Youth policy belongs to one of the key sectoral policies of the supranational, national, regional and local levels of government in the European perspective. Youth represents a specific category of the population, an internationally standardised age and socio-demographic category of the population aged 15-30. We assume that the future of Europe depends on its youth. At the same time, research to date indicates that young people's opportunities to meet their living standards and well-being perspectives through their own work [with regard to education] are alarming in today's Europe [Mihálik 2019]. The previous *EU Youth Strategy 2010-18* set two overall objectives:

- *Investing in youth* by providing more and balanced opportunities for young people in education and in the labour market;
- *Empowering young people* by encouraging their active participation in society in a variety of ways.

To put this briefly, in terms of investing in youth a number of measures have been identified that can help to expand skills, experience and education, employment opportunities in the form of an employment relationship and self-employment to strengthen human capital [Kovacheva 2014] and include issues relating to health and the quality of life of young people [Bello 2020]. The EU Youth Strategy recognized the continuous gap between young people and the institutional system and urges policy-makers to address the following issues through action:

- Promoting dialogue with young people and promoting participation in national and European policy-making;
- Supporting youth organisations and national or local youth councils;
- Promoting the participation of under-represented groups;
- Encouraging the principle of participation from an early age;
- Promoting e-democracy, which can help disorganised young people [EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018].

The new EU Youth Strategy, which runs from 2019 to 2027, aims to solve the current and potential problems that young people in Europe face. It establishes a system of goals, values, priorities, priority areas, and measures for all relevant stakeholders to collaborate on youth policy, with a focus on engaging, bringing together, and inspiring young people. Young people need a strong role model. Young people must be involved in the development, implementation, and assessment of policies that impact them, such as the EU Youth Strategy and National Youth Strategies. It's important to be as inclusive as possible, to respond to current and future challenges, and to look at new and different ways of participating in public life. Young people go through a variety of traditional changes in their personal lives and environments, including transitioning from school to work, living on their own, forming relationships, and

beginning a family. As a result of globalisation and climate change, technological change, demographic and socioeconomic trends, populism, bigotry, social isolation, and fake news, many people are concerned about their future [EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027]. Empowering young people allows them to take control of their lives and gives them a distinct advantage in determining the trajectories that influence the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Then, it is essential to provide them with a healthy atmosphere in which they can build trust, gain education, resources, and informal ways to achieve these goals. As a result, youth policy is vital to achieving a European vision in which young people can seize opportunities which correspond to European values [EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027].

Current evidence and situational analysis of young people in Europe provides some critical social, economic and political challenges regarding youth:

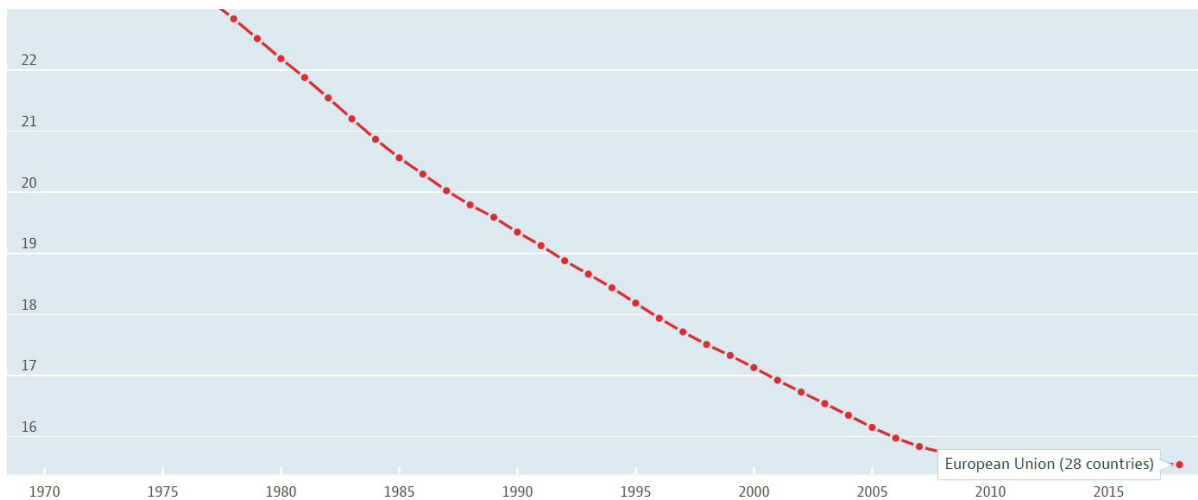
- Some groups of young people have difficulties in accessing and obtaining education;
- Poverty and social exclusion still affect a high proportion of the youth population;
- The electoral turnout of young Europeans is constantly falling;
- Youth in Central, Eastern and Southern Europe faces incomparably greater challenges in education, employment and inclusion;
- The share of children and young people in the EU is constantly declining and this decline is also expected in the future [Situation of young people in the European Union 2018; Mihálik 2019].

On the contrary, compared to the post global financial crisis development [2008] there are also some positive milestones:

- Young people are educated to an increasingly higher level;
- More young people are finding employment;
- There has been some improvement in the social inclusion of young Europeans;
- Young people appear less prone to risky health behaviours;
- Young Europeans are demonstrating an increasing interest in politics and are taking advantage of the new methods of participation offered by modern technology;
- Participation in voluntary activities shows an exceptional expansion [Situation of young people in the European Union 2018].

An illustration of the critical situation which will deepen the current state of generational challenges is shown in Chart 1. The share of children and young population in the EU under the age 15 years between 1970 – 2018 is constantly declining, from 24.7% in 1970 to 15.5% in 2018.

Our previous research has confirmed some trends in youth policy such as a higher level of education and social status are related to higher participation in elections and youth unemployment reduces the likelihood of participation in elections [Mihálik 2015; Mihálik 2019]. Other studies have identified that young people in Europe show low interest in voting in a system of representative democracy. However, they tend to participate in other forms of political engagement, such as participation in demon

Chart 1: Share of young population in the EU under 15 years [% of population, 1970 – 2018]

Source: OECD [2021], *Young population [indicator]*. doi: 10.1787/3d774f19-en [Accessed on 16 March 2021]

strations, petitions, consumer boycotts and access to online political forums [Rossi 2009]. The political activity of young people thus changes compared to the older generation, not only in relation to turnout. Compared to the older generation, young people are beginning to look for new forms of political engagement based on their individual attitudes. These forms are much less stable, have a horizontal structure and offer flexible forms of interventions [Sloam 2013]. Despite long-term youth work programmes, the current value orientation of youth is unsatisfactory, in addition young people's political preferences often oscillate between democratic standards and European values of democracy. It is therefore important to continue the quality training of young people in the field of education as well as to monitor trends and requirements at the level of labour relations in the context of the young generation. In the implementation of any youth research or any youth discourse we must necessarily reflect the interest in this category of population, as we assume that the European Union and the Member States are genuinely dependent on their youth, their future, their quality of life and their satisfaction with the environment in which they operate. The political values and preferences of young people are also created depending on the setting of social and political discourse towards this category of citizenship [The National Democratic Institute 2018]. Unfortunately, the very declarative view that young people are detached from the context of participatory democracy does not stand at present. It is therefore necessary to initiate the mentioned agendas, create a public discourse on the position and role of youth, permanently increase the possibilities for their involvement in decision-making processes and require the so-called *voice of youth*. Despite the relatively widespread platforms for youth work and the elimination of social stereotypes of intergenerational conflict, there is still a gap, especially in the form of a significant regional conflict in the approach to ensuring quality of life,

personal well-being, educational opportunities and the inclusion of young people in public policy. There is no systematic and comprehensive quality work with children during their pre-school preparation, formal education and non-formal educational activities which should also be critically assessed.

The literature review characterising the political values of the young generation focuses mainly on the so-called democratic paradox [Pattie 2004]; for the contradiction between a relatively stable belief in democratic values and ideas and a low level of participation in the institutions of representative democracy [Cammaerts 2014]. The departure from a formal policy for young people generates other social and economic phenomena of contemporary youth. Empirical studies have confirmed that the young generation perceives democracy as a fair and healthy tool for the organisation of society and takes a positive view of traditional concepts of democracy, choice and the creation of the will of the people [Norris 2003; Mihálik 2015].

The issues of employment, housing and the environment have become the areas of greatest interest. Communication tools such as television, the Internet and social networks are the most important sources of information that young people use to obtain information on politics and public affairs. However, these media can also serve as a space for young people to participate.

At the same time, they do not emphasise the alternative possibilities of participation in the functioning of society, while public and civic institutions [schools, family and others] do not sufficiently prepare them for active citizenship. The reluctance to enter the process of creating and building basic democratic values leads to the young generation being disillusioned with the real implementation of politics [Torcal, Montero 2006]. Julia Weiss gives another contradiction to the participatory status of the young generation in contemporary Europe: young adults are prone to vote in national elections, there is a drop of youth membership in political parties and generally a low level interest in politics and new forms of political participation that are more appealing to youth are on rise [Weiss 2020].

The crisis of the current youth policy and value orientation of young people is thus caused by the real picture of social, economic, political life, the youth migration and emigration followed by the escape of young people for better living conditions. However, this fact does not apply exclusively to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe; on the contrary, this phenomenon is also measurable in relation to the countries of Western Europe. The current value orientation of youth is therefore a truly evolutionary concept, a response to many political and social failures and an underestimation of the concept of youth work in a modern democratic pluralistic society. Young people must be part of the decision-making process, a measure of the quality of democracy, the future of the nation and of European society. It is therefore necessary to approach the evolutionary strategy of youth work responsibly, longitudinally and by adopting a pan-European perspective [Mihálik 2019].

3. GFC, COVID-19 AND YOUTH: IMPACTS OF THE TWO CRISES

Besides our aim to identify current trends in youth policy implementation in the framework of the European strategy for youth, we aim to confront new challenges that have emerged from the two crises that have had direct influence and long-term impacts towards the young generation [15-30].

The Global Financial Crisis [GFC] which occurred as a sequence of events between 2007 and 2008 and has continued over the following years has proven to be the worst economic depression and global economic disaster since the Stock Market Crash in 1929 and World War II. A lot of economic and social sciences researchers pointed their attention to unemployment rates and drops in the labour market [Čajka, Abrahám 2019] but lesser attention was paid to the very vulnerable category of youth unemployment. However, those who studied the economic recession from the youth perspective argued that GFC followed by the global economic depression has struck young people much harder than any other category of population [Choudhry, Marelli, Signorelli 2010]. Since its beginning, the social status of many young people in the EU has been deteriorating and youth have been affected by direct unemployment rates that have changed the situation over labour markets in Europe. Statistically speaking, almost 5.6 million young Europeans were unemployed in 2013 within the EU [Tschekassin 2014]. In their other later research, Choudhry, Marelli and Signorelli argue that the impact of the GFC on youth unemployment shows greater negative outcomes compared to the general, natural and continuous level of unemployment [Choudhry, Marelli, Signorelli 2012]. We may also state that research on youth unemployment prior to GFC was generally an underestimated topic in social and economic sciences research. On the contrary, these topics include critical variables such as the crisis of the education system from a local and national perspective, unemployment of young people that generates other associated phenomena such as poverty and homelessness and also situations related to regional [under]development – a lack of job opportunities for young people following migration and the emigration of young people to foreign labour markets or seeking education abroad.

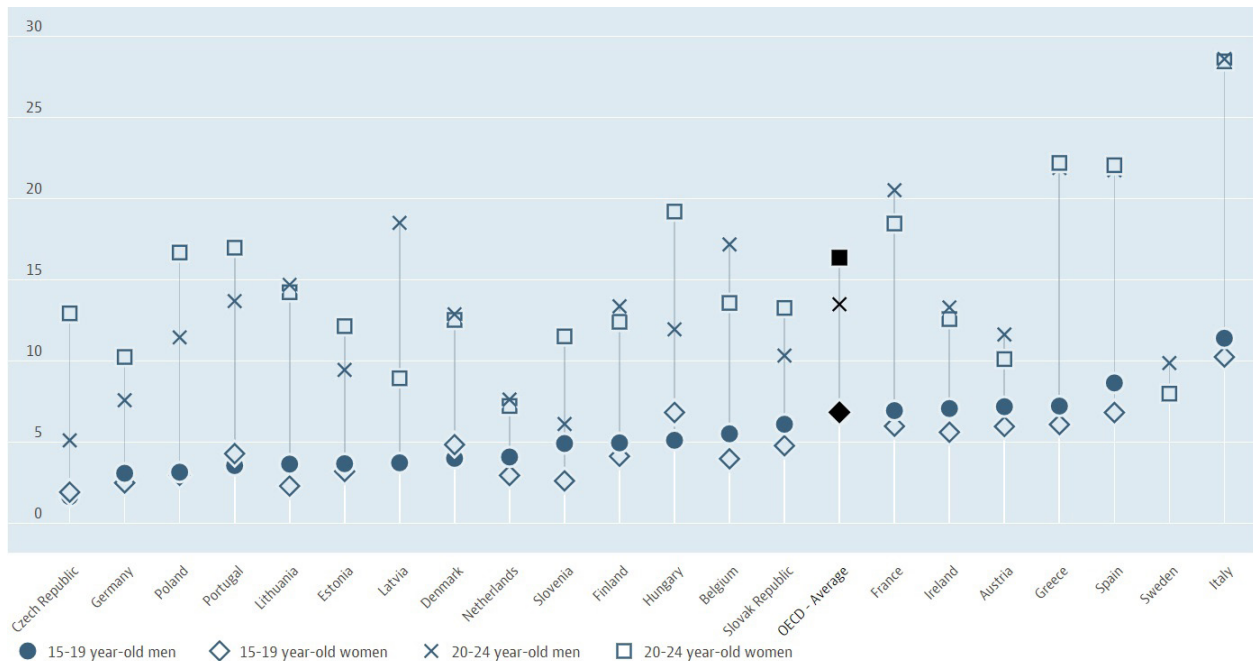
Young people in Europe belong to the endangered generation in light of existing global challenges. Some authors already refer to the GFC and COVID-19 youth as a lost generation [Tamesberger, Bacher 2020]. While having a pessimist attitude towards their development, we can also perceive them as a very influential group in creating basic models of behaviour and value orientation. Their values, norms and attitudes are considered feasible and important inputs into the political and economic system. Youth values and prisms are the determinants that will affect society for the future, including youth well-being. We can perceive them sociologically through the prism of intergenerational continuity, as well as politologically with a connection to the creation of political culture. Our long-term goal in the field of youth is to identify the causes, offer solutions towards applied practice with the ambition to create policies and enter into a participatory discourse with the young generation. We believe that

for these ambitious goals, values are at the centre of attention and are an integral part of the construction of generations, or are at the core of the crystallisation of political culture, economic balance and a modern, dynamic pluralistic society. If unemployment brings problems in society, we should not ignore the changes that are necessary for the value system of those looking to engage in a society, economic life and education [Grigoryeva 2012]. The authors Chabanet and Giugni [2013] point out that labour market protection can have a negative impact and that multilateral and diverse solutions need to be applied. However, within the conditions of Central and Eastern Europe, labour market flexibility significantly increases youth unemployment, which contradicts the findings of Chabanet and Giugni. According to Furlong [2013], the phenomenon of NEETs [Not in Education, Employment or Training] has become a more complex factor [Panzaru 2013], an indicator of the young generation that does imply more than youth unemployment. The research of the OECD panel data analysis shows that growth, inflation and savings are parameters that affect youth unemployment negatively so these are among the key determinants of youth unemployment [Baylak, Tatli 2018].

While there have been improvements made in the position of the labour market and the share of youth NEETs has been slowly declining, Chart 2 below illustrates the dramatically different positions of youth NEETs in the European perspective. In 2016, for the first time since the GFC, the share of NEETs was lower than the share of inactive young people. The share of young Europeans in material need has also decreased since 2012 and 2010 [Mihálik 2019]. On the other hand, the authors Lahusen, Schulz and Graziano [2013] state that despite the EU's efforts to overcome and combat the crisis and youth unemployment, this effort has remained a severely limited and minimalist protection policy, which works more in favour of the self-employed. In order to reduce the level of youth unemployment, we can apply several measures, especially those at the local and regional level. There are also other features that directly imply the solutions towards youth unemployment. In this context, we have to bear in mind the ongoing wave of Industrial Revolution [4.0], which, in addition to the benefits of new technologies, robotics and digitisation, uncompromisingly brings social risks including those that directly affect young people.

Offering new forms of employment for young people may oscillate on the verge of abuse. There is very limited legislation to protect adolescents and young people in the labour market, as well as limited options for starting new entrepreneurship and achieving more significant economic results. On the other hand, there is a question of how to guarantee the social securities of young employees? The search for the optimal degree of scope and nature of the legal regulation of individual categories of employees is always a compromise between the employer and the employees, but also between the capital and the individual forms of work performed. Here we mention the flexicurity of youth employment. The flexibility carries the pitfalls of having an employee always available. Previous studies have proven that flexicurity policies often

Chart 2: Youth not in employment, education or training [NEET] 15-19 year-old men / 15-19 year-old women / 20-24 year-old men / 20-24 year-old women, % in same age group, 2019



Source: *Education at a glance: Transition from school to work. OECD [2021], Youth not in employment, education or training [NEET] [indicator]. doi: 10.1787/72d1033a-en [Accessed on 17 March 2021]*

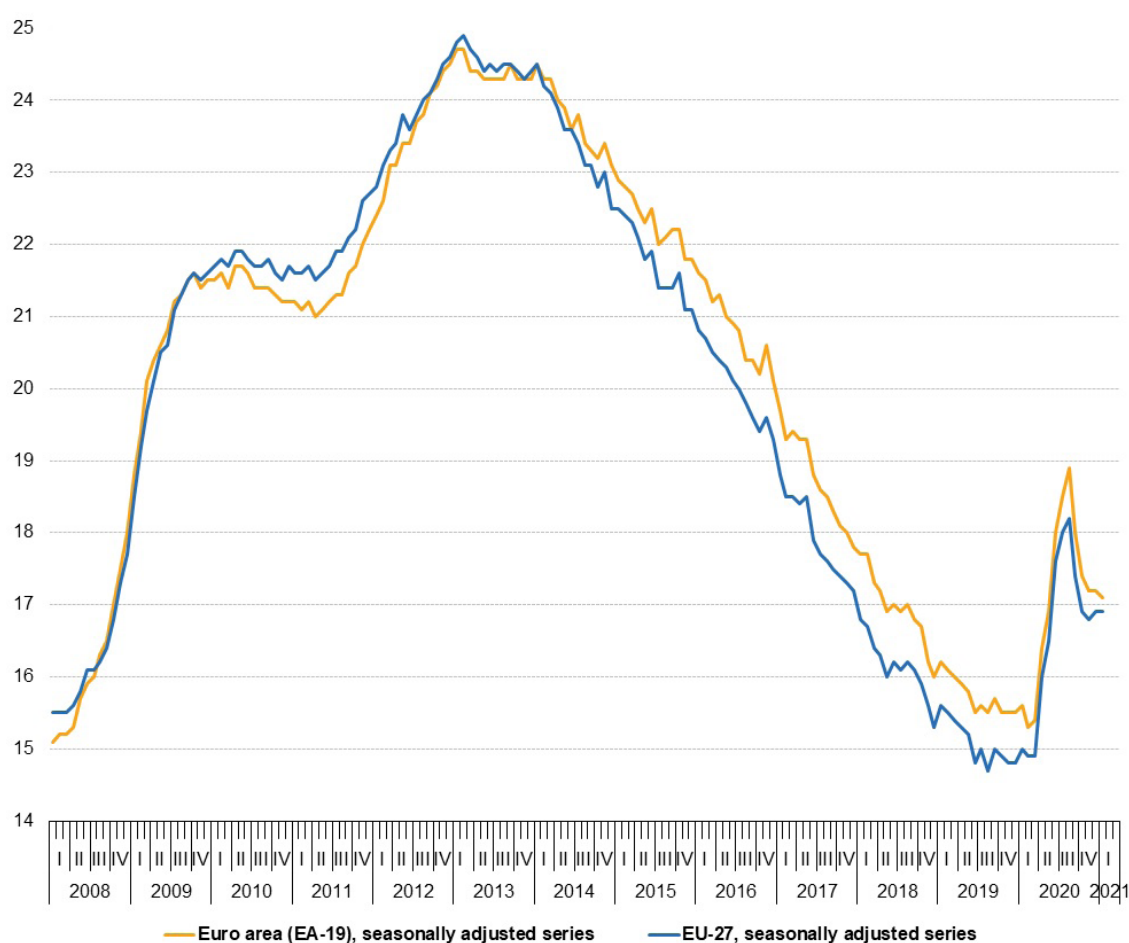
have a disproportionate impact on young people, specifically in the form of reducing their job security [Madsen et al. 2013 in Smith, Villa 2016]. This blurs the distinction between the work and private spheres. Any tools and means by which flexibility in employment relationships can be achieved can only be used as long as they do not violate the right to human dignity. Eamets et al. [2015] state that an effective balance of labour flexibility and security is essential although there are always blind spots [Smith, Villa 2016].

The GFC and also the COVID-19 crises have pointed at a different way of looking at the current form of industry and services and the emergence of the digital society, but also at the legal regulation of social relations, as it affects other areas of life, especially the labour market and the position of employees [young people] in the labour market and in the social and working environment.

A study by the International Labour Organisation surveyed more than 12 000 young people aged 18-29 from 112 countries in April-May 2020. Thus said, the research took place over 2 months during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic which, according to recent data, has not reached the peak of pandemic itself related to the number of deaths, health deterioration and other direct or indirect impacts on people and their social, economic or political status. The survey results have pointed and highlighted that at least three-quarters of studying youth experienced school closure while not all of them were able to join the distance and alternative learning methods [ILO 2020]. About 13% of young people were left alone without any access to edu-

cation, particularly youth from lower-income countries but this may be also true for regional disparities in well developed EU countries. The digitalisation of educational systems varies across states and show visible gaps in the already acute situation. For example, in the case of Slovakia, where schools were closed for the majority of 2020 and the first months of 2021, an absolute majority of children and young students had to undertake courses online although the systemic digital transformation of schools has been a repeated political goal since 2010. Similar results can be found in the field of employment status, which also refers back to some dimensions of GFC affecting the youth labour market. In 2020, more than 17% percent of youth were unemployed, specifically those employed as clerks, in services, sales and other related trades [ILO 2020]. Since the pandemic has been ongoing and on the rise since the early months of 2020, it is expected that these negative trends in youth unemployment will also rise. It is now mostly visible in the proportion of young people in part-time jobs where this is the category of employment that falls rapidly and also the job offers in part-time are mostly limited. The COVID-19 pandemic has also brought about the fact that following direct infection health-related diseases, the other main determinant of the crisis is employment status.

Chart 3: Youth unemployment rates: January 2008 – January 2021



Source: Eurostat, 2021. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/une_rt_m/default/table?lang=en

Note: The unemployment rate is considered to be a lagging indicator. When there is an economic downturn, it usually takes several months before the unemployment rate begins to rise. Once the economy starts to pick up again, employers usually remain cautious about hiring new staff and it may take several months before unemployment rates start to fall [Eurostat 2021].

As identified in the UNICEF report, COVID-19 is aggravating a youth [un]employment crisis, especially for those categories of people graduating from secondary schools or universities [UNICEF 2020]. More than 267 million young people were considered NEETs even before the pandemic, so how has this gap been stretched during the ongoing crisis? We know for sure that the labour market has direct influence over the situation in the youth labour market: dedicated work-places are non-existent, there is a reduction in earnings from dependent work contracts, there is risk of job losses and young people are experiencing more obstacles to find work that would satisfy their expectations or be relative to their acquired education. Subsequently, illegal work and child abuse is on rise for the first time in 20 years [UNICEF 2020].

CONCLUSION

We have already discussed that the category of youth constitutes a vital part of each state population. It is very important to note that young people aged 15-24 will soon take important steps in political, economic and social leadership in the future. From these reasons it is rather inevitable to assess and evaluate the impacts of a pandemic towards future youth policies development. After more than a year of the COVID-19 outbreak, it is now possible to measure the social, economic and mental situation of youth during the ongoing pandemic situations including restrictions as adopted by particular governments. We argue that, for example, mental health is not only an assumption of the current state of mental situation of an individual. On the contrary, they are affected by the mental impact of the pandemic and especially after it opens a critical set of worries about youth future, access to education, job prospectivity, health impacts and disruptions in everyday social interactions. This is what constitutes the major concerns in relation to children, adolescent and youth mental well-being. Again, as we stress, it is rather important to listen to this particular proportion of the global population, since direct interventions and actions aimed at children and youth will be essential to diminish the negative effects of a pandemic and to propose safeguards to guarantee better scenarios in the future for post-pandemic youth development.

We are aware that the situation of young people on the labour market had been already complicated prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. The studies found that young people aged 15-24 were approximately three times more likely to become unemployed compared to the major adult population [ILO 2020]. The pandemic scenario only worsened this situation and has meant that more attention should be paid on how to diminish the current issues faced by young people in the labour market. There are still risks for young job applicants since the number of vacant labour positions are limited and the successful transition from school to a career working cycle is more

than endangered. Young people are thus exposed to negative trends of productivity already at the beginning. On the other hand, there may be many current students unable to finish their studies on time which also brings about their worsened position to provide efficiency in their working habits, ultimately resulting in economic recession as well as a reduced state in their mental well-being. Such young people may be prone to risk behavior which is then a very negative aspect towards their and general youth well-being.

The problem is that state governments' measures often lag behind the urgent needs of immediate interventions, which means that the impacts of the pandemic towards youth in the labour markets are more likely to escalate even when the pandemic itself is over. Similarly, distance learning methods, even though considered to be easily handled especially by young people, are inappropriate, they vary from school to school and provide for digital division between states, regions and cities. In the available data sets, many young people reported that continuation of their studies is in danger and they state that they have learnt much less compared to the standard situation. This is in line with the findings from the UN report [2020] that the impacts of COVID-19 are expected to significantly affect youth mental health, well-being and state of depression and that they will also need subsequent interventions to prevent such negative aspects. Many young people report that their future expectations are, to a large extent, impacted by the pandemic development: „the constant fear, worry and stressors in the population during the COVID-19 crisis could [will] have long-term, detrimental consequences for youth, including for example a deterioration in social networks” [Decent Jobs for Youth 2020]. From these reasons, measuring youth well-being and quality of life, which has intensified over recent years also from the academic perspective. can give some responses to the growing need to know which factors truly affect youth lives, environments and conditions where they occur. From the academic perspective we believe that positive youth well-being development ensures the intellectual and cognitive progress of society as a whole.

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