Covid
Screenagers
Socially distant, digitally close

Study of the impact of Covid-19 on youth in the Western Balkans

Study report: Kosovo
November 2021
Acknowledgements

Special thanks to all of the young people who took time to participate in Covid Screenagers: Socially Distant, Digitally Close study, and share their views, opinions, and experience. Above all, thanks to ninety bright-eyed, imaginative and promising young people across the six Western Balkan countries who helped us to shape this research.

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Foreword

We are delighted to introduce Covid Screenagers: Socially Distant, Digitally Close.

The world has been a particularly unwelcoming and unfair place for younger generations in 2020-21, with the Covid-19 pandemic interrupting their development, education, employment, and social life at a scale never seen before. Young people in the six Western Balkan countries are not an exception. To protect the most vulnerable segments of societies across the Western Balkan region, we all asked young people to sacrifice their dreams and ambitions. We asked them to give up on gaining new knowledge and skills, advancing their careers, travelling abroad and meeting new cultures, experiencing the dating scene, and seeking lifelong partners. It made their lives sometimes physically painful, and most of all hurtful to the soul: and we need to listen. This collection of reports is the British Council’s effort to listen, report young people’s thoughts, challenges, concerns, and suggest a call for action.

This research shows the heavy toll that the pandemic has wrought on young people in the Western Balkans. It reports the magnitude of the pandemic’s adverse impacts on the youth’s access to and quality of education, livelihoods and employment, mental health, social relations, and their future outlook. Additionally, the research found that negative impacts were unevenly distributed across diverse and complex youth populations in the Western Balkans. Those segments of the youth population who had already been disadvantaged before the pandemic were hit even harder by it.

The research findings indicate the strong resilience of youth in the Western Balkan region. Their core personal network consisting of family, friends, and romantic partners has persevered throughout the pandemic, as a significant share of them reported that those relationships have improved. Moreover, most of them managed to adjust to an increasingly online world, and they used the internet not only to keep in touch with people but also to make new acquaintances. One of the young research participants noted that it might be that we were socially distant but digitally close.

A silver lining in the research is youth’s attitudes towards the environment. The overwhelming majority of young people across the region said that the pandemic made them more aware of climate change challenges. Moreover, two-thirds of them reported starting to practise environmentally friendly behaviour as a result of the pandemic; this is a great source of hope for the challenges to come.

All these findings are fascinating, and we hope they will be useful to stakeholders across the Western Balkans, the UK and beyond. The research is also vital for the British Council, and it will inform and guide our work for the years ahead.

Our role is to build connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and the Western Balkans through arts and culture, education and the English language. A central objective for us is to design and run programmes that meet the needs and aspirations of young people, and support their personal, social and economic development, and promote open and inclusive societies. The British Council’s work in the Western Balkan countries always starts with partnerships and results in mutually beneficial outcomes. This report helps us respond precisely to what we hear from those we want to connect with the most.

The report provides a snapshot of a distinct period of the Covid-19 pandemic through the eyes of young people. It is a testimony to the most extraordinary year most of us will ever live through. I would like to thank the research team, who worked hard to bring this report to you. Above all, I would like to thank ninety bright-eyed, imaginative and promising young people across the six Western Balkan countries who helped us shape this research.

I hope you enjoy this report as much as I have. What it teaches us will echo in our work and lives in the months and years to come.

Milan Gnjidić
Head of Education, Society and Governance Contracts, Western Balkans
Report overview

The pandemic of Covid-19 has profoundly changed realities worldwide, but the ways it has affected various population groups are diverse. It is known that young people (aged 18-29) are in a fragile position in societies as this life stage is marked by multiple transitions in their course of life: from education to the labour market, from living with parents to independent living or starting their own family. Even in pre-Covid-19 social contexts, these transitions were coupled with a less favourable socio-economic position of young people (compared to older age groups), manifested through lower and unsecure or low paid employment.

In order to understand how the Covid-19 pandemic influenced different aspects of life and the socioeconomic position of young people, the British Council conducted a study in six Western Balkan countries. This report is part of this study and presents key findings about the impacts of the pandemic on young people in Kosovo. The report is structured as follows:

The methodology and approach section provides an overview of the study background, its purposes and the study development process. It describes the main quantitative and qualitative methods used in collecting and analysing data.

Section one, Impacts on youth livelihoods and employment, examines the magnitude of the pandemic’s impact on the economic standing of young people. It starts by exploring the impacts on young people’s income and ability to pay for basic expenses during the pandemic. It then examines adverse pandemics’ consequences on job loss and labor market opportunities. Finally, it extends the analysis to changes in the “world of work.”

Section two, Impacts on education, explores students’ personal experience of education during the pandemic. It examines four broad thematic areas: access to education, quality of education, social aspects of educational experience, and skills needed for the post-Covid future.

Section three, Impact on mental wellbeing and behaviours, looks at mental health and wellbeing dimensions of the young people’s experiences of the pandemic. It starts by examining changes in young people’s behavioral patterns. It then looks at the pandemic’s impacts on young people’s feelings. This is followed by reviewing young people’s coping strategies for preserving mental wellbeing and utilizing professional mental health support during the pandemic.

Section four, Young people’s views on society and social relations explores youth views on social issues of greatest importance to them during the pandemic. It starts with exploring young people’s opinions of the pandemic’s impact on their relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners. It then turns to their experience of discrimination and violence during the pandemic. It is followed by exploring young people’s views on broader social issues and their social activism.

Section five, Trust in and perceptions of media coverage during the crisis examines young people’s trust in media and their views about the media coverage of the pandemic. First, it looks at young people’s Covid-19 information sources and confidence in specific media sources related to Covid-19 information. It then explores the assessment of media coverage of Covid-19 by young people.

Section six, Young people’s views on the government’s response to the crisis examine the extent to which young people have supported the government’s handling of the crisis. It starts by looking at the support of three key policies: lockdown measures, public health guidelines (i.e., wearing masks), and mandatory immunization. It then explores the assessment of government measures from the standpoint of young people’s needs, concerns, and interests during the pandemic.

Section seven, Future outlook: hopes, concerns, and aspirations, looks at the future. First, it covers youth’s expectations on the impact of the pandemic on their long-term and short-term future. Then, it looks at the expected changes in their behavioral patterns/practices. Finally, it concludes with a list of government measures that young people think would benefit them the most to deal with the pandemic’s negative impact.
Methodology and approach

Study background

Covid Screenagers: Socially Distant, Digitally Close is a study that amplifies the voices of 7,271 young people between the ages of 18 and 29 who have lived through the Covid-19 pandemic in six countries in the Western Balkan region (Albania, BiH, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia). The study tells the story of how the pandemic has had an adverse impact on so many aspects of young people’s lives—education, employment and livelihoods, mental well-being, family and partnership relations, broader social relations, and their future. It gives an account of their feelings, their concerns, but also their hopes and aspirations.

The study was conducted through a genuinely youth-inclusive and participatory approach involving young people in the early stages of the study design and later in the validation and analysis phases. It was also inclusive in the survey stage by conducting national representative surveys in all six Western Balkan countries, with diverse ethnic and socioeconomic segments of the young population.

Purpose of the study

The British Council initiated this study based on our belief that it is essential to listen to and engage with young people, particularly in difficult times. The current pandemic is unprecedented in recent history, and young people have clearly been greatly affected by it in areas of education, employment, mobility, mental health, etc.

At the heart of this study is a commitment to exploring the youth voice and choice, with a view to achieving three main aims:

1. Understanding and examining the impact of the Covid-19 on young people’s lives, with a focus on livelihoods and employment, education, and mental health, social relations, trust in media and government, and their future outlook.
2. Amplifying youth voices by putting their views and ideas in the centre.
3. Supporting better youth policymaking during the pandemic and in the post-pandemic period.

Covering the whole Western Balkan region, we aimed to develop a comparative approach that would show similarities among youth in the region. Moreover, we hope that the differences and disparities shown in the report will help governments, donors, and NGOs have a more nuanced and tailored approach to the young population, responding effectively to the needs of different subgroups in the post-pandemic period.

Methodology

Our approach was iterative and multi-method, with the research taking place over three key phases:

First phase: Participatory approach to study design

From the very beginning of this study, our idea was to make this research led by youth and for youth. With this in mind, we initiated an online call titled “Share your Covid story” and invited young people aged 18-29 to share video or written submissions by answering the following questions: 1) How has Covid-19 impacted your life?; 2) How is Covid-19 going to shape your future?; and 3) How do you see the world after Covid-19? In total, 455 people responded to the call, out of which 248 answers were eligible. Among the respondents, 71 per cent were female and 29 per cent were male. The youngest respondent was 18 years old and the oldest was 29 years old. The distribution of respondents per country was as follows: Albania (35), BiH (16), Kosovo (25), Montenegro (98), North Macedonia (23), and Serbia (51). Respondents came from 76 different municipalities across the Western Balkans.

Upon submission, a group of researchers carried out an analysis of the qualitative data using grounded theory to identify the main topics of concern for young people. During this stage, we identified 15 young people per country among the respondents (in total 90), with the aim of working with them to design the survey questionnaire. In this regard, during November 2020, the topics of concern for young people identified by the qualitative analysis were discussed in gender-balanced focus groups with selected participants. Two focus groups in each country were conducted by three facilitators (12 focus
As a result of the great enthusiasm and devotion of selected participants, a survey questionnaire was designed.

**Second phase: Quantitative survey**

As a result of Phase 1, the recruited survey agency Deep Dive reviewed the designed survey questionnaire to ensure its accuracy and appropriateness to the specific national contexts of each Western Balkan country. Nationally representative surveys of young people aged 18-29 were conducted in all six Western Balkan countries. The sample collected across the Western Balkan countries was 7,271 persons, with approximately 1,200 interviews each in Albania, BiH, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, with a margin of error ±3.1 per cent confidence interval level of 95 per cent (Table 1).

Table 1: Achieved sample across the six Western Balkan countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>1172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia &amp; Herzegovina</td>
<td>1295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td>1261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td>1156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Macedonia</td>
<td>1155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>1232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total sample</strong></td>
<td><strong>7271</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

respondents, gender balanced, living across different geographies (urban and rural) and with varying levels of education and income. The methodology used for the collection of data was in-person Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI), whereby the interviewer used an electronic device to record the responses. Data collection took place between January 8 and February 15, 2021. Having in mind that data collection took place during the pandemic, special attention was given to the survey participants, in line with the national public health guidelines and the British Council best practices.

The sample was created using a standard 3-stage stratified sample (geographical region/settlement type/household). Households were selected by the random route technique starting from the given address and identifying household members aged 18 to 29 years old. In the case of two or more qualified respondents per household, the ‘next birthday method’ was applied.

One of the main aims of the research project was to understand the challenges experienced by young people who are particularly vulnerable and most at risk: to these ends, the study emphasizes harder-to-reach segments of the population. Where necessary, sample boosts were made to include these groups.

Hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups included in this survey were as follows:

- largest national minorities in each of the countries (up to the sample of a minimum of 100 respondents per ethnic group in each country)
- young people studying abroad (up to the sample of a minimum of 30 respondents in each country)
- young people with disabilities (up to the sample of a minimum of 30 respondents in each country)
- NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). Since this group is large enough in all countries, there was no need for additional interviews in any of the countries.

**Third phase: Qualitative analysis**

The study adopted two qualitative approaches during this phase: focus group discussions with young people selected by the local partner Deep Dive and qualitative follow-ups with young people who participated in the survey design back in October 2020. These approaches allowed the study to have rigorous insight, verify and contextualize the findings from the quantitative phase, and gain a more in-depth understanding of the lives of youth during the pandemic. Both focus groups and qualitative follow-ups were conducted online due to the Covid-19 pandemic and moderated by highly trained moderators with skills in discussing sensitive topics with young people and facilitating group discussions, including in online environments.

Focus groups delivered by Deep Dive were conducted during March 2021. Local partners recruited six young people per country to participate in focus groups that lasted two hours. In total, six focus groups were organized with a total of 36 participants. To obtain insights into different segments of the youth population, the composition of focus groups varied across the countries. In BiH and Albania focus groups’ participants were students of the final year of secondary education (high school or vocational school) between the ages of 18 and 20. In Montenegro, Kosovo and North Macedonia, participants of focus groups were between the ages of 18 and 29, and they were all unemployed but looking for a job. Three participants lost their jobs during the pandemic, while the other three lost their jobs before the pandemic. Finally, in the Serbia focus group, participants were between the ages of 23-29 and were students expecting to graduate soon (BA or MA).

Qualitative follow-ups were organized during the first half of March. In total, four focus groups were conducted, each lasting one hour, with a combined total of 24 participants who took part in the survey design.
Screenagers

Kosovo
To whom we spoke

- **Main Sample:** 1000

**Gender**
- 51% (Female)
- 49% (Male)

**Age**
- 62% (18 – 24 years old)
- 38% (25 – 29 years old)

**Settlement type**
- 60% (Urban)
- 40% (Rural)

**Region**
- 11% Ferizaj
- 7% Gjakove
- 10% Gjilan
- 12% Mitrovica
- 10% Peje
- 28% Pristina
- 22% Prizren
Ethnicity:
- Albanians: 96%
- Serb: 3%
- Roma: 0.2%
- Turk: 0.1%

Activity status:
- Employed: 36
- Unemployed: 36
- Student: 26
- Other: 2

Highest completed education:
- Uncompleted primary school: 1
- Primary school (ISCED 1): 7
- Some/incomplete secondary school: 7
- Secondary school (ISCED 2-4): 61
- Tertiary (ISCED 5-8): 23

Student status (n=370):
- Secondary/High school: 10
- University: 90

Boost Sample:
- Roma: 101
- Serbs: 99
- Youth study abroad: 28
- Youth with disabilities: 31
- NEETS: 90

Total Sample: 1261
This is the first time in my life that I feel like there is no country on the globe where I can escape...where I can go and escape lockdown measures and live “old normal”. The virus is everywhere...none is exempted. I have a lot of friends from abroad, and they share the same feeling. (Male, 24)

I am really passionate about IT technology, and social media, so I spend a lot of time on the internet and socializing online. I am really annoyed when other people complain about the “digital lives” during the pandemic. I always ask them,” Can you imagine your life without the technology and internet during the pandemic”. Many people are not aware of how their lives would be even more miserable without IT. (Female, 21)
The Covid-19 pandemic has made the already precarious situation of Kosovo youth – almost half of whom are unemployed – even worse. In total, 43 per cent of youth reported that their income had decreased (either significantly or somewhat) during the pandemic. Not surprisingly, one-third of youth in Kosovo (and their families) reported problems paying for basic goods and services. Young people with lower levels of education were more likely to be faced with an income decline, as were young men compared to young women. The pandemic is likely to further exacerbate the problem of youth unemployment in Kosovo looking ahead, with over half of youth responding that they had not applied for a single job in the six months prior to the survey.

Backdrop

Kosovo has the youngest population in Europe, with more than half the population being under 25. However, at the same time, Kosovo – and its youth in particular - have been exposed to poor labor market prospects for decades. Before the pandemic, the unemployment rate among young people (aged 15-24) was 49.4 per cent, and it was higher among young females (60.3 per cent) than among young males (44.1 per cent). Across the Western Balkans, ‘push’ factors behind emigration are arguably strongest in Kosovo, primarily due to high unemployment and low wages. The difference in average wages between entry level positions in Kosovo and EU countries is staggering, even in promising sectors such as IT and telecommunications – reportedly, entry position annual wages in IT & telecommunications are between 30,000 and 44,000 EUR in Austria, Germany, and the UK compared to a broad estimate of 5,000 EUR in Kosovo. Consequently, it is hardly surprising that many young people in Kosovo choose to leave.

The pandemic risks further exacerbating the weak labor market and economic position of youth in Kosovo. Kosovo’s economy was heavily affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2020, Kosovo’s economy recorded a contraction of 6.9 per cent, mainly due to declines in consumption, especially due to a diaspora-related decline in travel services and investments. A mitigation and recovery package worth around 4.3 per cent of GDP was implemented in 2020, focusing on income support for vulnerable individuals, budgetary support for the healthcare sector and support for firms through wage subsidies and easier access to borrowing. At the end of 2020, the unemployment rate among youth (aged 15-24) was marginally lower compared to 2019 and it stood

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2 Mihail Arandarenko & Stefanie Brodmann (2019), Job Opportunities for Youth in Kosovo: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?
3 EBRD (2021), Coronavirus response in 2021: building back better.
at 49.1 per cent. However, young people were still twice as likely to be unemployed as adults, and young women were more likely than young men (57.2 vs 45.2 per cent).4

Findings

The pandemic impoverished young people in Kosovo. While almost half of the respondents in the survey (48 per cent) stated that their personal income during the Covid-19 pandemic had remained the same as before, 43 per cent of young people stated their personal income either significantly decreased or somewhat decreased. Only 3 per cent reported that their personal income had increased (Figure 1a). Young people with completed primary and secondary education were much more likely to report decreases in their incomes (46.3 and 51 per cent, respectively) than those with completed tertiary education (30 per cent). Young men were also more affected by income decline than young women (47 vs 39 per cent).

Further to this, as a result of the pandemic, one third of youth (and their families) reported challenges to pay for basic goods and services (29 per cent) such as: utility bills (one in five); essential food and hygiene (one in ten); basic clothes (one in ten); medicine and health care services (just over one in ten); pay for their studies (one in twenty). The remaining three-fifths of respondents did not have these issues (Figure 1b).

Figure 1a: Personal income during the pandemic
How would you describe your personal income during the Covid-19 pandemic? Unit: %

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It significantly decreased</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It somewhat decreased</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It has been the same as before</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It somewhat increased</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It significantly increased</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1b: Financial abilities during the pandemic
As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, my family and I family struggle to? Unit: %

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pay utility bills</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy essential food and hygiene</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay for my studies</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay for medicine and health care</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy basic clothes</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay loan</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The pandemic further aggravated the vulnerable economic position of Roma and NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) youth in Kosovo. Even before the pandemic, the situation of Kosovo Roma and NEET was grim when it comes to income-related problems. Although Roma youth reported income declines during the pandemic less often than the main sample (35 vs 43 per cent), they have struggled more to make ends meet. Namely, Roma youth have the highest percentage of those responding that they struggled to pay for basic goods and services - almost two-thirds reported struggling to pay utility bills (63 per cent), while just over half of Roma struggled to pay for essential food and hygiene and buy basic clothes (53 per cent). Further to this, the percentage of Roma youth struggling to pay for medicines and healthcare was 52 per cent. When it comes to the NEET segment of the youth population, they suffered income declines to the same extent as others. However, they more frequently reported difficulties in paying for basic expenses than the main sample: 45 per cent of them reported struggling to pay for at least one of the basic goods and services compared to 29 per cent for the main sample.

Working youth in Kosovo were hit hard by pay cuts and job losses. While for around half of those in employment wages remained the same as prior to the pandemic, 42 per cent of employed respondents declared that their pay had decreased, while only 7 per cent declared that their wages increased. On balance, seasonal workers, the self-employed/freelancers and those in part-time work were hit the hardest by pay cuts. Namely, 64 per cent of seasonal workers and the self-employed/freelancers reported wages decrease (somewhat/significantly decrease), while 57 per cent of part time employed reported the same. By contrast, those youth in full-time employment were the least likely to face wage decreases during the pandemic, as 37 per cent of them declared pay cuts.

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Of the 36 per cent of unemployed youth from the main sample, three out of five had no work experience (60 per cent), with a notable gender gap visible as a greater share of young females than males who had no work experience (69 vs 48 per cent, respectively). Among those with previous work experience almost half lost their job during the pandemic (47 per cent): one in three respondents attributed job loss to the pandemic (32 per cent), while one in six did not attribute their job loss to the pandemic (15 per cent, Figure 2). Among them, more men than women lost their jobs due to and during the pandemic (55 vs 36 per cent, respectively). Furthermore, slightly more rural youth with previous work experience suffered job loss compared to their urban peers (44 vs 36 per cent).

This adverse impact of the pandemic on the youth labor market was further corroborated by our focus group participants, as one of them stated: “Personally, I worked in a bar, however, when the measures started to be tightened and the red areas were targeted (cities with a large number of infected people) the work started to fail and because of the pandemic I have become unemployed. Now it is also a problem to find a job” (Male, 23).

![Figure 2: Job loss during and due to Covid-19](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before Covid-19</th>
<th>During Covid-19 but not due to it</th>
<th>Due to Covid-19</th>
<th>Something else</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32</td>
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</table>

As the survey data suggest, in all likelihood, the existing problem of high youth unemployment in Kosovo will probably be further exacerbated by the pandemic. This is further underpinned by other research conducted regarding the pandemic’s economic impact, which suggested that around 50,000 workers lost their jobs during the pandemic and that over 10,000 businesses were forced to close. Furthermore, another study reported that in November 2020, 55 per cent of businesses declared the impact of the pandemic to be very negative and that the greatest majority of youth worked precisely in the most affected private sector – 95 per cent of those in the 18-24 age range and 79 per cent of those in the 25-34 age range. The same study reported that workers in restaurants, cafes and hotels were most likely to have lost their jobs followed by workers in construction and the retail trade sector.

**Unemployed young people in Kosovo struggled with job applications.** Just over half (55.2 per cent) of unemployed youth had not applied for a job position in the six months prior to the survey’s conduct. Of the remainder, one third (34 per cent) applied between 1 and 3 times, 7.5 per cent applied 4 to 10 times, and 3.3 per cent applied more than 10 times. Additional analysis indicates that a greater share of those with no job application is observed among young females than males (47 vs 61 per cent), rural than urban youth (40 compared to 61 per cent), lower educated than higher educated, and Kosovo Albanians than Kosovo Serbs (57 vs 13 per cent). Therefore, the profile of young unemployed people who were more likely to display passive job searching behavior and/or require assistance/support in this process would be the following: females with a Kosovo Albanian ethnic background from urban environments with or without completed primary and secondary education. When it comes to the reasons for not seeking employment, a recent study reported that the most pronounced reasons were a wish to finish education first and family responsibilities. Additionally, the qualitative data of the same study indicate that there’s a lack of hope for a better future and the lack of perspective in general are reasons why some young people in Kosovo have lost their motivation to seek employment.

**A small share of working youth in Kosovo switched to remote working, and those with completed tertiary education were more likely to work from home.** Almost nine out of ten (88 per cent) of employed young people in our sample physically went to the workplace all or most of the time during the pandemic, while 9.2 per cent worked from home all or most of the time. Those young people with lower levels of educational attainment were more likely to go to the workplace than those with higher education degrees who were more likely to work from home. This suggests that youth with lower education levels work in professions and sectors which require physical presence (construction, sales, manufacturing, agriculture etc.), while higher educated youth have skills and knowledge that allow them to work remotely, in professions where physical presence is not of crucial importance. This further implies, that lower educated working youth in Kosovo were at greater risk of contracting the virus during the pandemic.
The pandemic created a wide range of work-related challenges, which were perceived differently according to working arrangements. Working youth faced a range of challenges during the pandemic, and the most commonly reported challenges were compliance with public health guidelines, i.e. wearing masks (33 per cent), safety at work, i.e. the danger of being infected with the virus (16 per cent), lack of teamwork (20 per cent), and lack of funds (15 per cent). However, work-related challenges during the pandemic were perceived differently between those who went to their workplace and those who worked from home (Figure 3). Compared to those who worked from home all or most of the time, working youth who went to their workplace all or most of the time were more concerned with the wearing of masks (49 vs 14 per cent, respectively) and safety at work/contact with the virus (43 vs 23 per cent, respectively). On the other hand, the employed respondents who worked from home all or most of the time more commonly reported different challenges: lack of teamwork (35 vs 18 per cent), delay of projects and plans (21 vs 10 per cent), access to the internet (19 vs 5 per cent), access to online platforms (21 vs 4 per cent); and lack of IT skills and support (12 vs 5 per cent). Furthermore, those who worked from home most or all the time indicated some advantages of home-based working, such as decreased risk of contracting the virus (57 per cent), saving commuting time (54 per cent), flexible working hours (47 per cent), and money saved (45 per cent).

**Figure 3: Work-related challenges**

*Have you faced any of the following work-related challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic?*

*Base: employed respondents, n=423; Unit: %*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Home/ mostly home</th>
<th>Workplace/ Mostly workplace</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to internet</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of teamwork</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety at work (contracting Covid-19)</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wearing masks</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>48.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing private and business tasks</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of adequate workspace and equipment</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of funds</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of opportunities to travel</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delay of projects and plans</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of IT skills and support</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to on-line platforms</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something else</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Covid 19 has caused a major disruption to education in Kosovo, as elsewhere. Overall, three in five students reported learning less during 2020 than they would in nonpandemic circumstances, with the problem being more pronounced among secondary school students than university students. In particular, the pandemic exposed the divide between those with full and uninterrupted access to the internet and those without, with the latter far more likely to report learning less than their peers. Aside from learning, young people’s sense of belonging to an educational institution or group of fellow students has also declined.

Backdrop

One-third of survey respondents (32 per cent) who are still in education, have had a different educational experience than before the pandemic. As part of containment measures, all schools and universities closed in March 2020. For the upper secondary level, grades 10-12 (gymnasiums and vocational schools) the organization of distance learning was left to the responsibility of the municipalities, while university students’ distance learning was provided by their faculties. Schools reopened again on 14 September, utilizing in-person, combined and distance learning programs depending on the epidemiological situation. From October 2020, institutions of higher education were holding online courses. Exams and practical laboratory work could be held in person but were to respect national public health guidelines. When the pandemic hit, there was no national distance learning system in place. Internet penetration and mobile telephony connectivity were, however, high. Existing platforms were used to ensure some learning continuity during school closures, including public television, YouTube, and local-level solutions.

Findings

An overwhelming majority of students in Kosovo think they learned less during the pandemic, with those experiencing problems with accessing the internet and online platforms reporting learning loss more commonly. Nearly two in three students said they had learned less than they would in regular, non-pandemic circumstances (60 per cent, Figure 4). This opinion was more pronounced among high school than university students (71 vs 58 per cent). Furthermore, limited access to digital education was reported by almost half of students in Kosovo (47 per cent). Not surprisingly, further scrutiny of data revealed that students who had problems with access to the internet and online platforms were more likely to state that they learned less compared to those who did not have these issues (75 vs 55 per cent). Additionally, those who had issues with accessing the internet and online platforms were more likely to come from the group of students who declared an income decline during the pandemic. In terms of regional differences, these problems seemed to affect students in the Gjilan/Gnjilane region the most, where
72 per cent of students reported problems with accessing the internet and online learning platforms, and 79 per cent of them said they had learned less than they would in regular times. These findings were further echoed by focus group participants, as some of them described their online learning experience as follows: “I think that the online learning was not very good. I missed more input from lecturers, and had endless internet connectivity issues…I feel like I learned less than I did the previous year” (Male, 23)

Decreased levels of engagement and increased problems with exams/homework were widely reported by students in Kosovo. Most students (55 per cent) reported decreased involvement and participation in classes compared to pre-pandemic times, while 33 per cent stated the opposite. Decreased participation in classes is more commonly reported by high school than university students (42 vs 30 per cent). An even larger share of students reported problems with exams/homework because of COVID-19-related changes (60 per cent), although almost half of them reported spending more time studying (49 per cent). Similar to the perception of learning loss, those students who had problems with access to the internet and online platforms were more likely to report decreased participation in classes and increased problems with exams/homework compared to those who did not have these issues. Furthermore, these problems were further reiterated by focus group participants, one of whom said: “I did not enjoy online learning. It reduced my participation in classes, and I had to spend extra time studying to pass exams. It was more difficult for me” (Female, 20.).

Young people’s identification with educational institutions has decreased, as well as the feeling of belonging and group cohesion. Seven in ten students in Kosovo felt less close to their peers due to Covid-related changes (73 per cent), with this sense more widely shared among university than secondary school students (73 vs 54 per cent). A sense of distance from their teachers and school/facility is even more strongly felt by students. Namely, 80 per cent of students asserted they felt more distant form their teachers and felt being less part of their school/faculty.

Students need a new skill set to succeed in the post-Covid world. Our surveyed respondents believe that enhanced critical thinking problem-solving skills, creativity, and innovation (45.4 per cent) are perhaps the most important skills of the future (Figure 5). Social and emotional skills to ensure effective collaboration, management, and self-expression (42.3 per cent) are also seen as important, as well as the ability to operate at pace in a fully digital environment (40.7 per cent). This skill set reflects the findings of the research produced by the World Bank which suggests that the skills that are most in demand are socioemotional skills, foreign language skills, and computer skills.11 This is further summed up by one of our focus group participants who said: “Knowledge in computer science is currently required; programming is in high demand in the private sector. Also, personal skills, the ability to be cooperative, to manage stressful situations, etc.” (Male, 27).

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**Figure 4: Education and Covid-19. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Base: respondents who are in school/university, n=370; Unit: %**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree/Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree/Strongly agree</th>
<th>Not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel less close to other students at my school/faculty due to Covid-19 related changes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more distant from teachers at my school/faculty due to Covid-19 related changes</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel like I am less a part of my school/faculty due to Covid-19 related changes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get involved and participate in classes at school/faculty to the same extend as before Covid-19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the Covid 19 time I learned less, than I would learn in regular time</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have more problems with my exams/schoolwork/homework because of Covid-19</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have problems with accessing internet and on-line learning platforms</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11 For more see: Brancatelli Calogero, Marguerie Alicia, Brodmann Stefanie (2020) World Bank Group, Job Creation and Demand for Skills in Kosovo What Can We Learn from Job Portal Data?
### Figure 5: Future skills
*What skills will you need the most to thrive in the post-Covid world. Please select the top 2 priorities. Base: respondents who are in school/university, n=322; Unit: %*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expand the ability to operate at pace in a fully digital environment</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced critical thinking problem-solving skills, creativity, and innovation</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and emotional skills to ensure effective collaboration, management, and self-expression</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build adaptability and resilience to thrive during Covid 19 aftershocks and beyond</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the start, I was overwhelmed with emotions, such as fear, anxiety, sadness. Latter I started feeling angry, because I thought that some of my life is stolen, that someone prevented me to explore life, travel, enjoying concerts, to learn…It is not easy to accept this. I am still struggling to adapt. (Male, 19)

I felt helpless being at home…but I’ve noticed others were helpless, too. Particularly my older neighbours. And then I decided to approach them and see if I could help them somehow. Some of them admitted to me that they are afraid of going to buy essential food or medicines. Some of them accepted my offer to do this for them. It was a really rewarding experience. (Male, 22)

My life has been turned upside down. I was supposed to go abroad for undergraduate studies. And then when the pandemic started, I faced a dilemma about what to do: to attend the university abroad online or to attend a domestic university. At then, both were delivered online…I decided to pause for a year. Education abroad is not only about learning, it’s about experiencing something different. It is difficult to experience this online. (Female, 18)

I was just about to start cohabitation. But, soon after the pandemic broke out, my boyfriend lost his job and we had to give up our plans. I am unemployed, too, and unless one of us has a job we cannot start living together. (Female, 25)
The pandemic changed the daily routine and lifestyle of more than half of surveyed young people in Kosovo. The reduced time spent on activities outside the home, including joint time spent with people beyond the immediate family, was substituted with the excessive screen time. Young people reported increased feelings of worry and annoyance and that their more limited freedom of movement negatively affected them. Loneliness was another common problem affecting youth, particularly the youngest subgroup among them, yet very few actually needed or used professional support due to Covid-19-induced mental health issues.

Backdrop

Research conducted prior to the pandemic showed that spending time with family, listening to music, watching movies and going out with friends were among the most common ways that young people in Kosovo spent their free time, while spending time in bars and clubs or on sporting activities were also frequent leisure activities. The Covid-19 pandemic has introduced unprecedented changes in the established lifestyles of young people in Kosovo, bringing a sudden loss of structure, routine, and sense of isolation and loneliness. One recent study found that three in four young people in Kosovo (77 per cent) expressed slight to extreme concerns about coping with stress, and 83 per cent felt that physical and mental health were essential in their lives. The focus groups of the same study also revealed that mental health problems are often perceived as not sufficiently addressed and acknowledged in Kosovo. Another study that evaluated the mental health of university students in Kosovo during the early phase of the Covid-19 pandemic found that situational variables related to the Covid-19 pandemic - such as seeking excessive information related to Covid-19, knowing someone who tested positive for Covid-19, expressing concerns about family members’ health, reporting concerns about being lonely and the economic consequences of Covid-19-related measures, and reporting problems with online

Findings

Just over half of young people (55 per cent) reported that their daily routine/lifestyle changed because of the pandemic, with rural youth being more likely to assert this than urban youth. When asked about how their habits have changed, our focus group participants mentioned that during the quarantine they had spent time trying to learn new things and skills, socializing online, reading, watching movies and attending online classes. These focus group insights further underpinned survey results about changes in time use during the pandemic. Young people reported an increase in time spent on the internet (73 per cent), with family (76 per cent), watching movies (57 per cent), and domestic chores (40 per cent, Figure 6). At the same time, some things became much less practiced during the pandemic, as could be expected, including traveling for pleasure (50 per cent), spending time with friends (57 per cent), and doing sport (32 per cent). Furthermore, the survey data reveal gender differences in time use. Young females compared to their male peers were more likely to report reduced time spent with friends (65 vs 47 per cent) and on doing sports (30 per vs 16 per cent). In contrast, young females had spent more time on domestic chores than young males (47 vs 33 per cent).

The time spent on the internet was high even before the pandemic. According to the findings of the abovementioned Youth Study Kosovo, a majority (56 per cent) of young people in Kosovo access the internet ‘practically all the time’ in one way or another (Wi-Fi, smart phone, public, PC and/or other means. The survey data indicate that the main reasons for using the internet often, which means at least once a week, are associated with communicating and keeping in touch with relatives and friends. It is clear that during the Covid-19 pandemic, the internet became not just a way of keeping in touch with people, but also a way to make new acquaintances. Almost the same share of young people agreed and disagreed with the statement “I have met more new people online than face to face during the pandemic (40 per cent and 41 per cent, respectively), while the remaining 18 per cent neither agree nor disagree. 

Young people’s mental wellbeing has been negatively impacted by the pandemic. Two-thirds

14 Aliriza Arënliu, A., et al. (2021). Anxiety and depression among Kosovar university students during the initial phase of outbreak and lockdown of COVID-19 pandemic, Health Psychology and Behavioral Medicine, Volume 9, Issue 1

15 Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2020). Youth Study Kosovo 2018/2019
of young people in Kosovo stated that a lack of freedom of movement imposed during the pandemic was very hard for them (70 per cent), with urban youth being more likely to feel this way than their rural peers. When asked about the specifics related to their mental wellbeing, youth in Kosovo reported feeling more worried and annoyed than before the pandemic (67 and 63 per cent, respectively), with young females being more likely to report these feelings than young males (Figure 7). Furthermore, one in three young people stated that they felt lonelier, more tired, and hopeless than before the pandemic (37 per cent each), while one in four reported sleeping and weight management problems (27 per cent). The younger cohort was more likely to feel lonelier than their older peers. Additionally, compared to those who were married or in cohabitation, young people who have lived separate from their partners and those who were single or separated felt lonelier during the pandemic. According to their employment status, the pandemic made those unable to work feel loneliest, followed by the unemployed and those still enrolled in high school/faculty, in comparison with those with full-time or part-time employment contracts. The mental wellbeing challenges were summed up most powerfully by our focus group participants, who stated: “During the quarantine I missed even the smallest detail of life outside the walls of the house. I felt extremely lonely” (Female, 24) or “Not being able to meet friends, close people, was something very difficult for me. I lacked interaction and social dynamics. The pandemic has affected me a lot mentally.” (Male, 22).

The vast majority (94 per cent) of young people have not been referred to or have not used any services because of Covid-19 induced mental health issues, while only 4 per cent used some of them, such as individual counselling with a psychologist, telephone based mental support, etc. They mostly cope with mental challenges on their own by deploying a wide range of self-coping mechanisms. The largest share of the youth population - more than one third of respondents (38.9 per cent) - did more of the things they enjoy i.e. watching movies) during the pandemic, to manage or to avoid mental problems, such as more exercise or taking up a sport (22 per cent), staying well informed (17 per cent), improving their diet (13 per cent) or trying to keep themselves busy (12 per cent).

The survey results suggest that the coping strategies used worked for 80 per cent of young people in Kosovo, as they stated they did not need any type of mental health support. The remaining youth population expressed the need for some support, such as courses/counselling for life skills, self-esteem or motivation, information about emotional or behaviour problems and treatment counselling or oral therapy about problems, and prescribed therapy/medication for emotional or behavioural problems. The main factors keeping young people from getting support were either a desire to work out
problems on their own or with the help of friends (39 per cent) or uncertainty where and how to get help (39 and 13 per cent, respectively).

At the moment that the survey was carried out, three-quarters of young people (75 per cent) had not been infected with the coronavirus, 15 per cent were not sure (they had symptoms but did not take tests/did not ask for medical treatment), 6 per cent had tested positive for Covid-19 but did not require medical treatment, while 3 per cent had a positive test and were treated by a doctor/nurse (Figure 8a and 8b).

The experience of young people who had a positive Covid-19 test and medical care/treatment was generally positive – they had enough space to self-isolate (97 per cent), received efficient and timely medical care when diagnosed with the virus (100 per cent) and had timely access to Covid-19 diagnostic services (86 per cent).

**Figure 8a: Covid-19 infection rate**

*Have you had COVID19?*

- 0.2% Yes, I was admitted to hospital
- 3% Yes, I was treated by a doctor
- 6% Yes, I tested positive, felt ok and I was not treated by a doctor
- 15% Not sure, I felt some symptoms, but I was not tested
- 75% No
- 1% Something else
- 0.3% Prefer not to say

**Figure 9b: and access to health care services**

*Please agree or disagree with the following statements Base: infected respondents, n=152*

- I had timely access to Covid-19 diagnostic services (testing)
  - Agree: 87
  - Disagree: 13
- I received efficient and timely medical care, once I was diagnosed with Covid-19
  - Agree: 100
- I have enough space in my place of living to self-isolate form other inmates/household
  - Agree: 97
  - Disagree: 3
While young people in Kosovo believe that the pandemic deepened social, economic, and political divisions in the country, they also think it brought people closer to those in their immediate surroundings: family members, romantic partners, and friends. Regarding their position vis-à-vis other groups in society, they overwhelmingly think that young people have been stigmatized as irresponsible virus spreaders. Yet, they rarely reported personal experiences of discrimination and violence.

**Backdrop**

Society in Kosovo is strongly shaped by the recent history of conflict over Kosovo’s independence and related nation-building process, including the unresolved international status of Kosovo. Therefore, interethnic relations – and differences – between Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs often dominate public discourse, and young people are not exempted from this. One recent study shows that young people in Kosovo still see these relations as tense and that Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs are less likely to report being friends with each other compared to other ethnic communities. Furthermore, a particular problem in Kosovo is the lack of integration of members of the Roma/Ashkali/Egyptian community into society and Kosovo’s institutions. A recent survey conducted by the OSCE concluded that the majority of members of these communities face high unemployment, poor housing, and experience discrimination, particularly women. Thus, the pandemic had the potential to further aggravate these already sensitive interethnic relations among young people. In the year that was marked by political instability, this potential was even larger. Namely, Kosovo saw the collapse of two governments and the rotation of three governments in power, along with one national election. Amidst political deadlock, the coronavirus pandemic further exposed the poor state of the country’s healthcare system, risking further erosion of social cohesion in Kosovo.

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16UNDP. (2021). *Youth Challenges and Perspectives in Kosovo*.
17OSCE. (2020). *Overview of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in Kosovo*.
Findings

Young people in Kosovo think that the pandemic improved their core relationships. Efforts undertaken to try to minimize the spread of Covid-19 have dramatically altered social life, putting at risk relationships within individuals’ social networks. However, if there was a positive side to the coronavirus pandemic in Kosovo, then it was in that young people in Kosovo believe that their relationships with family, friends and their romantic partners improved during the pandemic. Namely, over half of respondents asserted that their relationships with family improved during the pandemic (54 per cent). Regarding friendships, 37 per cent of youth reported they improved, while 40 per cent claimed they were the same as before the pandemic. Young males were more likely to report improved relationships with friends than young females. In regard to the relationship with romantic partners, twice as many respondents think their intimate relationships improved than worsened (27 vs 12 per cent), while others reported unchanged intimate relationships. These findings are not surprising since a recent study reported that family and friendships are very important to youth in Kosovo, and it may be that they put a great deal of effort into preserving them.

A clear majority of young people have felt stigmatized during the Covid-19 pandemic as irresponsible virus spreaders (58 per cent). Young females more than males, and urban youth more than rural youth were likely to feel this way. However, the experience of those who were Covid-19 positive paints a different picture. Namely, when it comes to the feelings of those who were infected by the virus, by and large they enjoyed support from their friends (90 per cent). Among the other 10 per cent who felt unease about the disease in their close surroundings, 8 per cent did not share the information that they were infected with friends, 3 per cent felt unsupported, and 1 per cent felt stigmatized. In terms of socio-demographic differences, youth in urban areas felt more unsupported than rural youth (14 vs 7 per cent), and young Kosovo Serbs felt the same more than their Kosovo Albanian peers (33 vs 7 per cent).

Although personal experience of discrimination has rarely been reported, one-third of youth think discrimination towards specific groups has increased during the pandemic. Personal experiences of discrimination during the pandemic were marginally reported, which might be partially attributed to the low awareness or limited understanding of the concept of and grounds for discrimination, such as ages, sex, ethnicity, etc. Only 2 per cent of respondents reported being discriminated during the pandemic. However, those already at risk of discrimination like Roma youth reported it more frequently (12 per cent). Although personal experiences of discrimination during the pandemic were marginally reported, more than one-third of young people believe that discrimination towards specific groups increased during the pandemic (39 per cent). Of those who believed discrimination was on the rise, seven out of ten young people believed that the most discriminated during the pandemic were elderly people; meanwhile, roughly one in three believed that youth, people with chronic diseases, people with disabilities or people from the diaspora were the most discriminated.

Experience and witnessing of violence, including gender-based violence were rarely reported by young people across Kosovo. Only a small share of respondents (2 per cent) reported that they experienced some form of violence during the pandemic, and a further 1 per cent of respondents noticed increased violence around them. Regarding gender-based violence, 1.4 per cent of youth witnessed gender-based violence in their close surroundings, while a further 1 per cent of respondents were victims. However, a survey is not a suitable method for exploration of sensitive topics such as violence, therefore it may be that experiences of violence have been underreported.

Most young people think that the pandemic deepened social, economic, and political divisions in their countries. They believe that Covid-19 made marginalized groups (Roma, people with disabilities) even more deprived than before, that the pandemic increased the gap between younger and older generations, made political divisions deeper and more decisive, made ethnic divisions deeper and more visible, and most of all, that it increased differences between rich and poor. This general perception does not differ by age or gender. However, young people from urban environments were more likely to believe that the pandemic made ethnic divisions in the country deeper and more visible. Further to this, there are significant differences by ethnicity, with youth from the Kosovo Serbian ethnic group perceiving divisions in a much higher percentage than Kosovo Albanian and Roma youth., for all the statements (Figure 9).
Although young people in Kosovo think the pandemic increased solidarity among people, they have not widely expressed solidarity themselves, in a practical sense, through volunteering. There is a positive perception that people felt more solidarity towards each other during the crisis – 70 per cent of those surveyed agree with this statement. There are, however, certain differences according to place of residence – while two-thirds of rural youth agree with this statement, the proportion rises to almost three-quarters (73 per cent) with urban youth. In contrast, less solidarity is perceived by youth with disabilities (52 per cent) and Kosovo Serb youth (42 per cent).

Only 8 per cent of the young people surveyed found a chance to volunteer during the pandemic. By contrast, 14 per cent of young people have not been interested in volunteering, 13 per cent did not have time, half of them (50 per cent) said that there were no relevant opportunities, and 15 per cent did not have access to information about volunteering opportunities. Every other young person (55 per cent) believes that volunteering possibilities decreased during the pandemic, as opposed to one in three (33 per cent) who think that they increased. More than two-fifths (44.4 per cent) of youth would volunteer to support Covid-19 impacted people, while a similar proportion (46.3 per cent) responded with ‘maybe’ and 9.3 per cent would not volunteer even if they had a chance. This finding shows a relatively high willingness for volunteering among young people in Kosovo and it should be harnessed by providing them with the appropriate information and access to volunteering opportunities.

**A globalized health crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic made young people feel more connected to the rest of the world** (67 per cent). In line with this, the same share of youth stated a desire to meet more people from other countries after the pandemic. Furthermore, the pandemic also appears to have positively impacted their opinion about foreigners (54 per cent). In terms of sociodemographic differences, the young cohort was more likely to express a desire to meet new people living abroad than the older cohort. Furthermore, higher educated young people were more likely than their lower educated peers to feel more connected to the rest of the world, report the positive impact of the pandemic on their opinion about foreigners, and express the wish to meet more new people from other countries. Finally, more young males than females expressed the desire to meet foreign residents and had an improved opinion about them.
When it comes to information about the Covid-19 virus itself, Kosovo youth had the greatest trust in those people around them who had already lived through the virus and family and friends. In terms of trust in media on Covid-19 over two-thirds of youth stated that they trust some or all media, while the remaining one-third do not trust any media on Covid-19. However, they believed that reporting often over-dramatized the situation, causing panic. While at times there was too much information in the media according to many of those surveyed, media reporting on the pandemic was still seen as understandable to youth.

Backdrop

The reporting of Kosovo’s mainstream media about the pandemic was positively assessed, particularly in the early phase. The mainstream media have, on the whole, maintained high standards of reporting in their coverage of the pandemic, keeping the people of Kosovo informed, basing their reporting on official sources and being careful to stick to verified information.18 Despite this positive assessment, youth in Kosovo have rarely used these sources of information to be informed about the pandemic. Namely, a recent study found that young people were more likely to make use of the internet and social media as their main source of information about the pandemic than older people, who were more inclined to make use of radio, television, and newspapers.19 This media consumption pattern further exposed young people in Kosovo to conspiracy theories, which, as in many other parts of the world, were mainly spread through social media. In this regard, the study on pandemic-related conspiracy theories in the Western Balkan found that the two most popular theories among Kosovo citizens were that the Chinese government engineered the coronavirus in a lab and that the pharmaceutical industry was involved in the spread of the coronavirus.20 These theories were popular among citizens regardless of age and educational attainment.

Findings

Regarding Covid-19 information, young people in Kosovo had the most trust in people with lived Covid-19 experiences (49 per cent) and friends and family (44 per cent). Other trusted sources, albeit to a much lesser extent, include international organizations such as the World Health Organization (16 per cent), scientists and health experts in general (13 per cent) and traditional media (11 per cent). By contrast, there is extremely low trust in online media (3 per cent), politicians and the government (2 per cent) and influencers and celebrities (1.7 per cent). Just over one in ten (12 per cent) of young people do not trust any of the sources. By and large, these results are in line with other studies relating to ‘trust’ among young people in Kosovo, which confirm that young people have the greatest trust in family in general, while outside this circle trust begins to diminish rapidly. Trust towards the world of politics, particularly political parties and the national politics system, has been continuously steadily declining among young people.

18 European Journalism Observatory (2020). Kosovo: Coronavirus and the media.

Yet, when asked directly whether they trusted media on Covid-19, just over two-thirds (67 per cent) of youth stated that they trust some or all media, while the remaining 33 per cent do not trust any media on Covid-19. There is a statistically significant difference according to ethnicity, with mistrust in the media among young people from the Kosovo Serb community running twice as high – 63.1 per cent - compared to those mistrusting media among Kosovo Albanians and Roma/Ashkali/Egyptians (31.9 per cent). Kosovo youth have the most trust in radio or TV programs (48.8 per cent), while 25.8 per cent do not trust any. They have the least trust in social media (20.5 per cent) and national newspapers (17.4 per cent, \textit{Figure 10}).

Young people in Kosovo negatively assessed media reporting during the pandemic with a high level of agreement with the following statements: media reporting has become filled with so much information that it became unclear and confusing (3.73 on a scale 1 to 5); that media are not reporting the true extent of the problem (3.71 on a scale 1 to 5), and that reporting dramatized things, and caused more panic (3.87 on a scale 1 to 5). However, young people think that media reported about the pandemic in a manner that is understandable to youth (\textit{Figure 11}).
Young people in Kosovo strongly supported lockdown measures that limited freedom of movement and strongly opposed mandatory immunization. They reported being highly compliant with public health guidelines. Nevertheless, young people felt neglected by the government throughout the pandemic. They felt like the government insufficiently considered their needs when designing and introducing virus containment measures and like it did not help them enough to deal with the negative impact of the pandemic.

Backdrop

The first year of the coronavirus pandemic was marked with different levels of restrictive measures to slow down the spread of Covid-19 in Kosovo. After enduring a strict lockdown period in the springtime - which included the closure of land borders, halting of business activities, and restricting people’s movement - Kosovo started to gradually open up again in June 2020. Since then, various spikes in Covid-19 cases have led to the reinstatement of measures across Kosovo impacting the people and economy. As elsewhere in Europe, from October 2020 until the Spring of 2021, the situation significantly worsened, with high numbers of new infections and deaths due to Covid-19. Throughout this period, Kosovo’s government(s) suffered from remarkable instability, paralysis and a lack of ability to govern and respond to the pandemic in the best way possible. Following the initial arrival of Covid-19, Kosovo’s then President and Prime Minister spent much of their energy sparring over whether a state of emergency – which would have given the president greater power in handling the crisis – should be introduced or not. As a result, the government was toppled on 25 March 2020. A new government was elected only in June under the leadership of the LDK’s Avdullah Hoti as Prime Minister; however, even though this government was short lived, it fell in December 2020 by a Constitutional Court ruling that deemed its election invalid, forcing fresh Parliamentary elections in early 2021.

Findings

According to the findings of this survey, young people in Kosovo positively perceived the overall government response to the pandemic. More than two-thirds of respondents supported the lockdown measures that limited freedom of movement (77 per cent, Figure 12). Furthermore, an overwhelming majority claimed being compliant with public health guidelines all the time (85 per cent), with young females reporting compliance more commonly than young males (89 vs 79 per cent). In regard to mandatory immunization, youth in Kosovo expressed
clear opposition to it (59 per cent). Regarding all these three questions ethnic differences are noted. Young Kosovo Serbs were more likely to disagree with lockdown measures than Kosovo Albanians (41 vs 9 per cent), and more likely to be less compliant with public health guidelines (71 vs 84 per cent). Lastly, they expressed a greater opposition to mandatory immunization compared to their Kosovo Albanian peers (75 vs 60 per cent).

**Figure 12: Attitudes towards the government’s crisis response**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree/Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree/Strongly agree</th>
<th>Not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Covid-19 immunization should not be mandatory</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have supported lockdown measures that limited freedom of movement</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have followed government measures all the time (social distancing, wearing masks)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey respondents were also asked to assess the government approach to pandemic management against the following four dimensions: government Covid-19 related messaging, the scientific base of government decisions, the adequacy and proportionality of measures to the given circumstances, and the effectiveness of measures in stopping the spread of the virus over time. Young people’s responses confirm that government Covid-19 related messaging has been clear and consistent (3.54 on a scale from 1 to 5). Furthermore, youth felt that measures were adequate and proportional in the given circumstances (3.39 on a scale from 1 to 5), while being somewhat effective in stopping the spread of the virus (3.35 on a scale from 1 to 5) and informed by science (3.31 on a scale from 1 to 5).

Urban youth considered government Covid-19 measures adequate and proportional in the given circumstances to a higher extent than rural youth, while young women showed higher levels of agreement than men that government messaging has been clear and consistent. Furthermore, Kosovo Serbs expressed a high level of disagreement on all four dimensions of the government’s pandemic approach (mean ranging from 2.6 to 2.8 on a scale from 1 to 5). In contrast, Kosovo Albanians expressed a high level of agreement with the government approach across all four dimensions (mean ranging from 3.4 to 3.8 on a scale from 1 to 5).

Youth in Kosovo think that the government insufficiently helped them throughout the pandemic. Yet when it comes to assessing the degree to which youth needs and interests were taken into account when formulating and implementing Covid-19 related measures, young people in Kosovo were much more critical (Figure 13). Almost half of young people think that the government has not considered youth concerns/feelings/interests when introducing Covid-19 measures, while some 50 per cent of them think that it did not do enough to help youth to cope with Covid-19’s negative impacts (i.e. in relation to employment, learning etc.). Young people had a more neutral feeling regarding the government’s communication approach to them, as 46 per cent of them felt like the government was speaking directly to them, while 32 per cent felt the opposite. An even harsher assessment of the government approach towards youth was provided by Kosovo’s Serbs. Nevertheless, these results suggest that, overall, young people did not feel directly embraced, or taken into account, by government measures.
**Figure 13: Government measures and youth**

*How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Unit: %*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree/Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree/Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government did enough to help youth to cope with Covid-19 (i.e. employment, learning, etc.)</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think government has considered youth concerns/feeling/interests when introducing Covid-19 measures</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt like the government was speaking directly to me when communicating Covid-19 measures</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Young people in Kosovo believe that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic will be mostly negative on their future overall. Among the most negative impacts of the pandemic, from the point of view of youth, will be prospects for travelling abroad and prospects for entering the labor market and incomes. Plans for migrating abroad have not been drastically changed – if anything, many young people have simply deferred these plans rather than abandoning them. In the post-pandemic world, young people believe that combating unemployment – particularly through fighting corruption – should be the key government priority.

Pessimism about the pandemic’s impact on their own future prevails among youth in Kosovo. The belief that the long-term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their future will be negative was present in 36 per cent of respondents, while 26 per cent of them believed it will be positive. A further 29 per cent see the long-term impact of the pandemic as neutral. This seems to be a significant deterioration since 2018/2019, when almost nine out of ten (87 per cent) of young people in Kosovo had optimistic projections about their future, and slightly less but still optimistic about the future of Kosovo society (71 per cent believed that it will be better). While most young people were pessimistic about the impact of Covid-19 on their future, there were some dissonant positive voices, who saw a silver lining to everything, such as one of the participants in our focus groups, who said, “I think the pandemic provides us with an opportunity to reset both our lives and societies. I see it as an incentive that will help me to build a better future for myself.” (Female, 24)

Most young people predicted that, over the next three years, the pandemic will have a mixed impact on their lives. Despite the general sense that the pandemic would have a negative impact on their long-term future, young people remained borderline positive about the pandemic’s impact over the next three years on their career prospects, housing plans, family planning, relationships with others, knowledge and skills prospects and physical and mental health outlook (Figure 14). On the other hand, they were distinctly neutral regarding entering the labor market and their own income prospects. Consequently, it can tentatively be concluded that, from the point of view of young people, the most negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic are expected to be prospects for travelling abroad and, secondly, prospects for entering the labor market/world of work and income.
Sociodemographic analysis of survey data indicates that the older cohort is more pessimistic about the impact of Covid-19 on their future over the next three years than the younger cohort. This applies to all items listed in the survey’s question. Furthermore, young people with lower levels of educational attainment are more pessimistic about the impact of the pandemic on their employment/career prospects than higher educated young people.

Moreover, young females are less optimistic about their labor market and career prospects than young men. Among disadvantaged groups, young Roma are markedly more negative than the main sample regarding the pandemic’s impact on their income (57 vs 30 per cent) and prospects of joining the labor market (43 vs 28 per cent).

Youth in Kosovo anticipate significant changes to their behavioral patterns because of the pandemic. They expect that they will use more digital services in the future (69 per cent), have more online interaction with people (63 per cent), and use more online learning (41 per cent, Figure 15). Due to this, a large majority of them expect that they will be more alienated from other people (60 per cent).

Furthermore, they expect that in the future they will increase domestic travel at the expense of international travel: almost half of them think they will travel more inside the country (48 per cent) and that they will travel less abroad (54 per cent). Yet above all, nine in ten young people think they will be more responsible for their actions in the future.
By and large, youth from Kosovo would like to emigrate for employment reasons. Almost two-thirds of young people would like to leave the country for work once the pandemic is over (59 per cent). A smaller, but still high share of young people is willing to leave the country for educational reasons (43 per cent). When asked if they gave up their Covid-19 migration plans due to the pandemic, 27.8 per cent of respondents answered this question positively. However, the focus groups conducted as part of this study suggest that many had simply delayed rather than gave up their plans to leave, as in the case of the following participant: "For me, Covid-19 has changed a lot of things. I planned to go to Germany and start working there and make a living. Since the embassies are not working like they used to, and since they are not taking a lot of cases, we’ve been left behind and not able to go and work there. Despite this, I still want to leave as soon as possible" (Male, 22).

There is a strong and statistically significant positive correlation between the desire to leave for employment or study reasons and the statement “the Covid-19 pandemic and the response of my government made me even more eager to leave the country and live somewhere else”. Therefore, the pandemic itself and the response of the government/measures could be considered as push factors that somewhat trigger or intensify this desire. Further cluster analysis suggests that the pandemic and government’s response to it triggered/intensified the desire for emigration mostly among young men from minority ethnic communities, living in urban environments, with completed secondary education, aged 18-24.

Kosovo’s youth also had clear ideas about the overall government spending priorities in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic. The overwhelming majority (85 per cent) saw fighting unemployment caused by the pandemic, particularly in the most affected sectors, as the number one priority. Not surprisingly, improving health care services, in particular infrastructure and human capital, were a key priority for almost three-quarters of young people (74 per cent). It is followed by improving the quality of education (54 per cent), increasing social benefits for those whose situation has worsened due to the pandemic (43 per cent), and improving environmental protection to fight climate change (36 per cent).

In terms of measures that would benefit youth the most to deal with the pandemic’s negative impact, employment should also top the government policy agenda. In line with this, young people who took part in our survey stated that they believe they would benefit most in dealing with the negative impacts of Covid-19 through measures which include decreased corruption in the employment process (73.1 per cent), while in close second place were increased subsidies for companies who provide youth with opportunities for entering the labour market (72.6 per cent, Figure 16). Surprisingly – given that relatively few young people reported needing such support or accessing it – improved access to and quality of mental health services was something pointed to by almost half of respondents (49 per cent). A similar proportion (48 per cent) pointed to improved provision of skills that could increase their employability – IT, language or entrepreneurship skills - and increased opportunities for paid internships (47 per cent). This priority list very much reflects the findings of other studies, which reported young people’s concerns about corruption and nepotism in the recruitment process. Much the same sentiment was reflected in our own focus groups, with participants mentioning that it is difficult for people in Kosovo, especially for young people (even if they are qualified) to find a good and well-paid job, if they do not have strong connections, if they are not part of a political party, or if they do not have the financial means to corrupt someone. “I have not applied for too many jobs recently. Even if I was looking for a job, I was always looking for jobs in the private sector, because everyone knows that in the public sector jobs are reserved.” (Female, 22)

Even those who lost their job during the pandemic or those who reported income decline prioritized decreased corruption in the employment process over subsidized jobs (60 and 38 per cent vs 53 and 37 per cent, respectively). Furthermore, Roma and youth with disabilities also picked decreased corruption in the employment process as a top measure that would benefit them the most in the post-pandemic period (61 and 87 per cent, respectively). Young people belonging to the Kosovo Serb ethnic community were even more vocal about the need to make the employment process fairer and more transparent (84 per cent). Only the NEET segment of the youth population expressed a different opinion about youth measures in the post-pandemic period, as they see improved provision of skills for employability (IT, language, entrepreneurship skills) as the key priority (78 per cent).
Figure 16: Youth-specific measures
Which of the following measures would benefit youth the most in dealing with negative impacts of Covid-19? Please select top 5 priorities. Unit: %

- Increased subsidies for companies who provide youth with opportunities for entering the labor market: 73%
- Decreased corruption in employment process: 73%
- Improved access to and quality of mental health services: 51%
- Increased opportunities for paid internship: 50%
- Improved provision of skills for employability (IT, language, entrepreneurship skills): 49%
- Improved financial assistance to young people in need: 47%
- Improved access to finance for business start-up: 41%
- Improved provision of health services for youth: 34%
- Increased social benefits for young families: 24%
- Increased opportunities for volunteering: 23%
- Increased housing subsidies for youth: 21%
- Improved provision of arts and culture: 15%
- Improved internet provision across the country: 10%
- Improved provision of sports and leisure for youth: 10%
- None of the above: 3%
- Other: 0%
83% think that the Covid-19 outbreak has had a substantial positive impact on many aspects of the environment.

82% state that the Covid-19 outbreak increased their awareness about the importance of the ecology.

78% started to act more responsible towards the environment during the Covid-19 pandemic.
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