

The impact of COVID-19 closures of educational, cultural, youth and sports activities on children and young people in the EU

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The Committee on Culture and Education adopted the own-initiative report by Hannes HEIDE (S&D, AT) on the impact of COVID-19 closures of educational, cultural, youth and sports activities on children and young people in the EU.

In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, Europe's youth face a mental health crisis. The closure of early childhood education and care provision facilities, schools, universities, spaces for youth welfare and youth work, as well as of extracurricular activities, cultural spaces and sports facilities, has denied children and young people the opportunity to participate in activities which are essential for their overall development, their learning progression, their intellectual, physical, emotional and mental health and well-being, and their social and professional inclusion.

This report emphasises the need for **multi-faced and holistic European action**, to promote mental health in children and young people. Educational, culture, youth, and sports facilities should be involved in ensuring the positive development of mental health in children and young people.

Increased funding

The committee called on the Member States and regions to provide sufficient financial support to mainstream **education institutions**, in particular through significant investment in public education, and to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers and education personnel, in order to ensure that the pedagogical, psychological, physical, emotional, cognitive and/or social development of young people is increasingly promoted in a satisfactory way.

Member States are urged to substantially increase public spending in **education and training to above the EU average** (5 % of GDP in 2020). Along with the Commission, they should also launch an EU-wide campaign to **raise awareness of mental health** in educational and vocational institutions in order to combat the existing stigma, to provide young people with access to mental health information and to create a clear and broader social understanding of mental health issues.

Highlighting the key role that a **healthy and balanced diet** plays in the mental health of children and young people, Member States should implement Child Guarantee Recommendation 4 asking, among other things, for **free access to at least one healthy**

meal each school day.

Funding should also be increased for Erasmus+, Creative Europe and the European Solidarity Corps to enhance **mobility experiences** which contribute to the development of useful and necessary social skills for the future personal and professional growth of the younger generations.

The Commission and the Member States are called on to support and adequately fund small local **cultural initiatives, sports clubs, leisure facilities, youth organisations and youth welfare institutions** to carry

out the leisure, non-formal and informal learning activities that play an essential role in the development and well-being of young people and their families, by providing material and psychological support resources, including for young people with fewer opportunities or facing discrimination.

Member States are urged to invest in specific policies, also in the framework of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, that respond to local needs in order (i) to **close all existing gaps**, including gender, economic, technological and social regional inequalities; (ii) to ensure that educational and vocational training institutions, youth organisations and structures, as well as learners and young people more generally, obtain sufficient financial support, with a special emphasis on the most vulnerable learners who are falling behind and need additional support in order to achieve the expected learning goals, and the schools serving high-poverty and high-minority populations; (iii) to make sure the necessary **technologies**, innovations, learning support facilities and tools, including digital tools, are in place to consolidate, further develop and deliver quality education and training, as well as informal and non-formal learning opportunities to all; and (iv) to support cultural initiatives bringing children and young people together in the framework of the cultural recovery of local communities.

Digital technology

Awareness should be raised among young people regarding the **benefits and risks** associated with digital technology, ensuring not only their access to technological tools, but also their ability to use them safely and properly.

European year of mental health

Lastly, the report called on the Commission to:

- designate a European Year of Mental Health and to develop a European plan for the protection of mental health in education, vocational training, and informal and non-formal learning;
- continue developing mitigating measures with regard to the negative consequences of COVID-19 closures on children and young people throughout 2023, and to make use of this year to propose a robust legacy of the European Year of Youth 2022 for the future.