

# EDUCATION AND YOUTH IN POST-COVID-19 EUROPE



The COVID-19 mitigation measures in Europe caused the closure of education institutions from Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) to universities, as well as interrupted activities of youth organisations, to halt face-to-face programmes. In many countries and for most programmes, online learning alternatives were put into place. However, the lack of comprehensive strategies, tools, and infrastructure for online education affected the quality of education provision, access and participation in education and youth activities, and reinforced existing inequalities in education. Lockdowns also adversely affected children and the mental health of youths.

## The study

demonstrates that the COVID-19 pandemic posed unprecedented challenges to the education and youth sector, revealing the lack of preparedness, as well as reinforcing structural weaknesses of education delivery. Recommendations are proposed for a robust action at the EU level to foster more resilient education and youth sector in Europe

## Main observations

The impact of the COVID-19 on education and on the youth sector strongly differs by education level and background of learners, for example:

- Pre-school and primary school education are barely adaptable to virtual environments due to the limited skills of pupils to work independently behind a screen. As a result, education relied on substantial engagement of parents as co-educators during the lockdowns.
- The reliance of Vocational Education and Training (VET) on practical training and work-place

apprenticeships caused significant deterioration in education and training available to VET students due to social distancing measures. Most practical training was replaced by theoretical education which does not provide the same level of skills development as the practical aspect.

- The university level is perceived as least affected by the lockdowns due to the level of independence of students and the existing integration

of Information and communications technology (ICT) tools and virtual classes. However, student mobility was hindered significantly by travel restrictions and national lockdowns.

- Youth exchange and training programmes relying on international mobility have also been interrupted. To ensure effective on-the-ground support, the EU allowed National Agencies to invoke the Force Majeure clause to manage delays, additional costs and other concerns related to the Erasmus+ projects.



On all levels of education, the quality and continuity of education depended strongly on the (digital) skills and digital capacity of educators, students, and families. Furthermore, children from disadvantaged backgrounds faced challenges both in their access to education (i.e., availability of laptops and internet connection) as well as family support and home learning environment.

National youth sectors were highly affected by COVID-19 lockdown measures. Youth organisations faced loss of funding, termination of activities, and challenges in outreach to vulnerable youth. They were also often left out from the consultation process on fighting the pandemic. Similar to Erasmus+, extensions and reimbursements were made more flexible for the EU Solidarity Corps (ESC) activities. However, due to the vulnerability of youth organisations, the effects of the Force Majeure clause for ESC were not as positive as for Erasmus+.



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## Conclusions and policy recommendations

In light of the lessons that can be drawn from the crisis, the study proposes a number of recommendations for robust action at the EU level to foster more resilient education and youth sector in Europe, focusing on the following key dimensions:

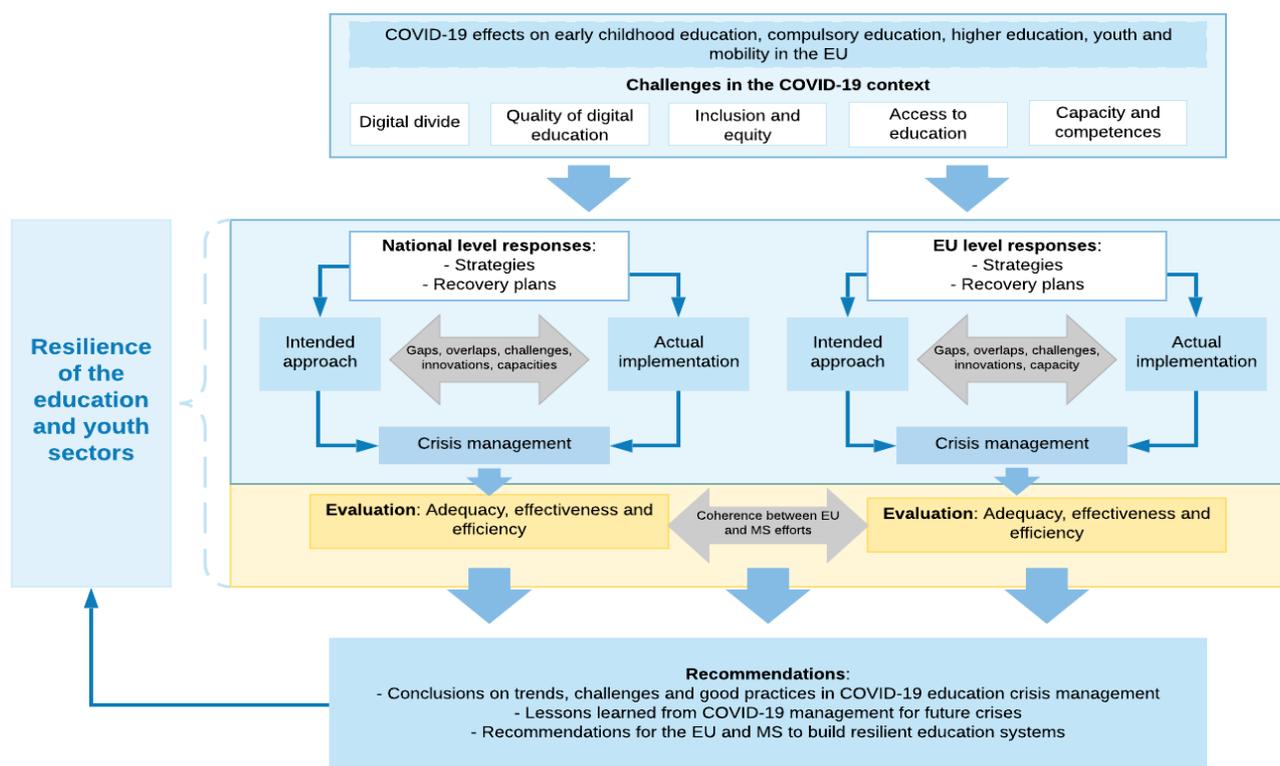
- Supporting collaborative decision-making and crisis management at the EU level in synergy with national measures.
- Supporting the improvement of quality and accessibility of education regardless of the context it is provided in.
- Developing strategies for a comprehensive support to students and young people in different formats of learning and re-imagining home-school partnerships.
- Encouraging smart funding and digitalisation in education and youth sectors.

- Improving the inclusiveness and flexibility of the EU funding programmes in the field of education and youth and their responsiveness to future crises.

### Key areas for EU action

1. collaborative decision-making and crisis management at EU level in synergy with national measures.
2. improvement of quality and accessibility of education.
3. comprehensive support to students and young people and re-imagining home-school partnerships.
4. smart funding and digitalisation in education and youth sectors.
5. flexibility of the EU funding programmes and responsiveness to future crises.

Figure: analytical framework



Source : PPMI

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