

**Research-based
analysis of European
youth programmes**

Exploring Erasmus+ Youth in Action

RESEARCH PROJECT ON THE IMPACT OF THE CORONA PANDEMIC ON YOUTH WORK IN EUROPE (RAY-COR)

**CASE STUDY ON A SUCCESSFUL RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS
PANDEMIC AND ITS EFFECTS ON YOUNG PEOPLE AND YOUTH WORK**

TURKEY NATIONAL REPORT

ERASMUS+ NATIONAL AGENCY OF TURKEY, PROGRAMME MONITORING UNIT

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report aims to analyse and explore successful responses of the youth organisations in Turkey to the COVID-19 pandemic through case studies in the context of Research Project on the Impact of the Corona Pandemic on Youth Work in Europe (RAY-COR). The report first describes the research sample and characteristics of the interviewed organisations in Turkey. Then, after a brief presentation of the challenges that youth organisations faced during the pandemic, their responses to the pandemic are grouped under case studies on five response categories entitled “Response category #1: Asking the Youth”; “Response category #2: Adapting Face-to-Face Activities to the Conditions of the Pandemic”; “Response category #3: Lobbying for Mainstreaming Youth as a Priority”; “Response category #4: Digitalisation (of activities, organisational functioning and support to youth work)”, and, “Response category #5: Developing New Projects on the Effects of the Pandemic on Young People”. The report concludes with a general overview of the case studies of response categories in a way to analyse the success factors.

What is RAY-COR?

Research Project on the Impact of the Corona Pandemic on Youth Work in Europe (RAY-COR) is one of the research projects of the RAY-Research-based analysis of European youth programmes. It is implemented by RAY Network, a research network with partners in 33 European countries with 29 languages.

Designed and initiated in 2020, RAY-COR research project aims to document and analyse the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on youth work in Europe, including the European Youth Programmes, and the response of youth work across Europe to the pandemic and its effects.

RAY-COR project involves all 36 RAY network members, including Turkey.

For more information: <https://researchyouth.net/projects/cor/>

1.1. RESEARCH SAMPLE

Five youth organisations were interviewed for RAY-COR on successful responses to the coronavirus pandemic. All of the interviews were conducted via Zoom as group interviews, including from 2 to 5 representatives of the interviewed organisation. The interviews were voice-recorded and no video recordings were made. Interviewees were asked for their consent related to personal data use under General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) via a web form prepared by the National Agency of Turkey. All of the interviewees not only filled in and accepted the web form but also verbally gave their consent at the beginning of each interview. Depending on the number of interviewees in the group, the interviews lasted 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews were conducted in the period of 11-19 February 2021.

Table 1: List of interviewed organisations for RAY-COR Successful Responses research.

Name of organisation	Number of Interviewees	Province	Interview Date
Gaziantep Eğitim ve Gençlik Derneği (GEGED) [Gaziantep Training and Youth Association]	2	Gaziantep	11 February 2021
Gençlik Örgütleri Forumu (Go-For) [Youth Organisations Forum]	5	Ankara	12 February 2021
Kentsel Gelişim Derneği (KEGED) [Urban Development Association]	2	Malatya	16 February 2021
TOY Gençlik Derneği (TOY) [TOY Youth Organisation]	5	Eskişehir	16 February 2021
Pi Gençlik Derneği [Pi Youth Organisation]	5	İzmir	19 February 2021

The youth organisations to be interviewed were identified according to their level of activity in the youth field. All of the organisations are actively offering and implementing youth work in Turkey. They provide local, national and international youth work activities. One of the organisations is an umbrella organisation with 59 member youth organisations. They are actively benefitting from the Erasmus+ Programme, and even had on-going Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps projects affected by the pandemic. Particularly, two of the organisations have high number of incoming and outgoing ESC volunteers. The interviewed youth organisations also have other activities funded by their own resources or a variety of other donors. In terms of their main working fields and geographical locations, the interviewed organisations reflect diversity of youth work context in the country. They have high level of experience in youth work.

1.2. CHALLENGES FACED BY THE YOUTH ORGANISATIONS DUE TO THE PANDEMIC

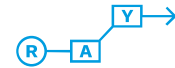
The explorative interviews show that the interviewed youth organisations faced a number of challenges from the outbreak of the pandemic onwards, which had an impact on the functioning of the organisations and provision of their youth work activities. Most of those challenges were related to the measures taken against the spread of the pandemic.

The first challenge has stemmed from the limitations to mobility, especially during the first months of the pandemic, in terms of physical encounters. Especially when the universities shifted to distance education and the students had to leave the city of the university to their hometowns, youth organisations did not only face decreases in human power, but also in the volume of their target groups. Moreover, limitations to international travel also impacted the course of European youth activities, especially the European Solidarity Corps activities, due to cancellation of travel plans or new visa regulations. In addition, limitations to mobility decreased the chances for the teams to meet in person for some time, which slowed down the functioning of the youth organisations.

A second challenge has stemmed from the lock-down measures. Most of the face-to-face activities had to be stopped, cancelled, delayed or transferred to other locations since the facilities where the activities were taking place (such as the oncology hospital, youth centres of the municipalities, refugee centres, etc.) were closed down due to the pandemic. Even in the cases where the facilities were kept open, the health risks prevented the youth organisations to continue with their activities not to create any additional risks for the vulnerable beneficiaries of the activities.

A third challenge was related to the ban of general assembly meetings of the associations. Most of the interviewees indicated that not being able to hold those meetings had a negative impact on the functioning of the organisations, since those meetings are the places where the future activities are planned and new board members are elected. It is important to state that the interviewed youth organisations consider those general assembly meetings not only as an official/procedural obligation, but as a venue of ensuring participation and deliberation among the members within the organisational structure. In addition, since the general assembly could not meet, some of the decisions could not be made or new members could not be admitted to the organisations.

A fourth challenge was financial difficulties. Due to the uncertainties in the course of the pandemic, youth organisations experienced some delays of contracts and payments from the donors, which created difficulties for them in terms of sustainability of the activities and payments to the staff members. In addition, increasing tendency towards digitalisation also created some additional costs for the youth organisations to be able to improve their technical infrastructure through purchasing equipment or paying



membership dues to the digital platforms. Some interviewees stated that their organisations experienced some crisis situations and had to develop crisis management reflexes especially for the on-going activities at the beginning of the pandemic, for example with regards to travel, accommodation or visa arrangements of the participants/volunteers of their activities.

2. CASE STUDIES ON RESPONSE CATEGORIES

In spite of all those unexpected challenges due to the pandemic, the explorative interviews make it possible to observe that after a short period of shock and inactivity, the interviewed youth organisations decided to act and have put tremendous efforts to cope with all the negative impacts of the pandemic. Explorative interviews make it possible to categorise youth organisations' youth work related responses to the challenges created by the coronavirus pandemic under case studies on five response categories:

Response category #1: Asking the Youth,

Response category #2: Adapting Face-to-Face Activities to the Conditions of the Pandemic,

Response category #3: Lobbying for Mainstreaming Youth as a Priority,

Response category #4: Digitalisation (of activities, organisational functioning and support to youth work),

Response category #5: Developing New Projects on the Effects of the Pandemic on Young People.

For the analysis of the case studies, in addition to the data from the explorative interviews, evidence and visuals from channels such as social media, newsletters, blog posts and/or news articles are also used.

2.1. RESPONSE CATEGORY #1: ASKING THE YOUTH

It is evident that Covid-19 pandemic negatively affected all segments of the society. Although some of those effects were common to everybody in the society, certain categories of population also faced some specific challenges. Young people (aged 15-25), with a population of almost 13 million and constituting 15.4% of total population in Turkey by the end of 2020¹, are perceived to be among the most affected categories, especially with regards to the challenges related to education and employment. Acknowledging the heterogeneity of youth population, the interviewed organisations were interested in identifying and responding to the different problems and needs of young people in Turkey during the pandemic. With such major concerns, all the interviewed organisations had kept their contact with their volunteers or target groups; and asked them about their problems and needs by using some classical instruments such as small-scale surveys. In this case study, two initiatives by the interviewed youth organisations, specifically designed to directly ask young people in Turkey about their problems and needs during the Covid-19 pandemic, are presented.

“COVID-19 PROBLEM MAP”

Covid-19 Problem Map is a country-wide initiative of Youth Organisations Forum (Go-For) aimed to monitor and respond to the violation of rights that young people experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic. From a rights-based perspective, Go-For considered that the measures for and conditions within the times of the pandemic could create additional risks for young people in terms of losing or backsliding of the acquired rights. Moreover, as indicated by the interviewees, such challenges might have also differed for different categories of young people such as young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs), young women, employed young people, young parents etc. From such a perspective, the Map was reported to be initiated in an effort to make violations visible and to provide space for evidence-based advocacy to be carried out at the local and national levels.



The Covid-19 Problem Map is available online at: <https://covid.go-for.org/>.

The Covid-19 Problem Map is designed as a website (<https://covid.go-for.org/>), which went online in May 2020 without any time limitation. Young people who had experienced (or any citizens who had witnessed) violations in the course of the pandemic were encouraged to use the map by stating the case, violated rights and location of the violation occurred. The challenges and violations for the map are categorised as right to education; right to employment; right to health; right to housing (including dormitories of the

¹ Turkstat, Address Based Population Registration System, 2020. <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=The-Results-of-Address-Based-Population-Registration-System-2020-37210>.

universities); political participation; right to life; freedom of assembly and association; and, freedom of speech. Among a total of 147 entries by March 2021, right to education, right to work and right to health have been the most cited violation of rights in the map.



By March 2021, there were 147 entries in the Covid-19 Problem Map.

With regards to ensuring visibility of the problems of young people during the pandemic, the interviewees stated that they were not really satisfied with the amount of data collected through the map. A hindering condition for the limited amount of data was mentioned to be the hesitation of young people to enter their problems into the map. The interviewees think that young people did not want to share their problems with the perceived risk of being stigmatised, as they were also asked to fill in their location or telephone number. It was indicated that indeed the system allowed to keep such information “anonymous” by the entry owner in the map, but there were still hesitations from the participants to use this option. As a result, the number of total visitors of the website remained much higher than the number of actual entries, showing that not everybody visiting the website had entered their problems into the map.

Apart from ensuring the visibility of the problems, the Map also aimed to respond to those challenges by mobilising the local youth organisations, who were also the members of Go-For, for taking action with regards to the violation. In that sense, one of the aims of the Map was to bring together the young people who faced challenges with the local youth organisations on the basis of the problem; and to encourage the local youth organisations to form public opinion and contact with the public authorities to help solving the problem. However, the interviewees stated that it was not efficiently possible to create the data partnership with the local youth organisations, due to the lack of human resources both for Go-For and for local youth organisations. The hindering condition for such an inefficiency was indicated to be the lack of extra funding. It was stated by the interviewees that the Map and the mechanism of advocacy attached to it could not develop as planned, since the Map was initiated with the own financial resources of Go-For and the staff had to work on other projects also.

Go-For still continues to implement the Covid-19 Problem Map initiative and prepares an analysis report for the entries in the Map, although collected data are not as extensive as they aimed for. As stated by the interviewees, and also learning from the previous experiences, the organisation is planning to develop the initiative further by carrying it to a larger scale, for example to the European level together with their European partner organisations; and, to sustain it for the following years as a violation of rights monitoring mechanism in a more general sense.

“DOCUMENTARY: YOUTH RIGHTS DURING THE PANDEMIC”

Considering that during the pandemic, the freedom, living spaces, mobility, education and training lives and psychology of young people were negatively affected, Urban Development Association (KEGED) decided to initiate a project to produce a documentary film about the loss of rights of young people during the pandemic. The aim of the documentary was to reveal how the young people were deprived of some rights and what kind of mechanisms they developed to access those rights during the pandemic. By increasing the visibility of the specific challenges of young people, the documentary aimed at increasing awareness about those problems among the policy makers.



The documentary is available online (with English subtitles) at the website of KEGED and on YouTube.²

In the documentary, life stories during and first-hand experiences with the pandemic of a visually impaired young female weight lifter, a female student and youth camp leader, a young artist, two young male rappers, and a young male entrepreneur advertisement agent were presented. In addition, the experts such as a psychologist, a public health expert and representatives of non-governmental organisations also provided insights about the impact of the pandemic on different categories of young people. By highlighting the heterogeneity of youth population, hence that of the problems and challenges that they face, the documentary presented the differential impact of the pandemic on young people, their struggle with the challenges in that period, and tough decisions that they had to take in their lives in an inspiring way.

The “Youth Rights during the Pandemic” project received funding from Sivil Düşün³. For the preparation of the documentary, the interviewees indicated that KEGED conducted a research and cooperated with an academic expert from Sivas Cumhuriyet University as the director of the documentary. The documentary was broadcasted in November 2020 and is still available on the website of KEGED and on YouTube. The interviewees also indicated that positive steps were taken to cooperate with some broadcasting agencies for further dissemination of the documentary.

² <https://www.keged.org.tr/proje/karantina--pandemi-surecinde-genclik-haklari-belgeseli-7326>; and, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qfjMYz_n5r4.

³ Sivil Düşün is “a European Union programme supporting active citizens and civil society organisations throughout Turkey” with a rights-based perspective. <https://www.sivildusun.net/about-us/>.

2.2. RESPONSE CATEGORY #2: ADAPTING FACE-TO-FACE ACTIVITIES TO THE CONDITIONS OF THE PANDEMIC

Evidently, the coronavirus pandemic caught youth organisations in the middle of their on-going projects and activities. While almost all the interviewed youth organisations transferred a great deal of their activities to the online platforms, three of them also decided to continue with some of their face-to-face activities, at the very beginning of the pandemic or when there was a relative opening up in Turkey in June 2020. Those organisations that continued with face-to-face activities were faced with the need to adjust those activities to the extraordinary physical conditions created by the pandemic, which were indeed not free from additional risks for the organisations. In this case study, how the organisations have been adapting to the conditions of the pandemic in their face-to-face activities are presented in relation to making the final decision for the face-to-face activities and practical organisation of the activities. In this context, both the supporting and hindering conditions such as mechanisms to cope with additional costs, crisis management and cooperation with the public institutions, are also presented. This case study also gives a brief overview of the efforts by the youth organisations to adapt their on-going and forthcoming European Solidarity Corps volunteering projects to the conditions of the pandemic.

The key aims to continue with the face-to-face activities can be categorised in three groups: to respond to the demands of the target group; to respond to the perceived needs of the target groups; and, to take initiatives backed up with the willingness and availability of the participants of the events. The organisations believed in the benefits of the face-to-face activities compared to digital ones, as this type of activities were considered to provide more efficient contact and communication with and among the young people through more interactive methods.

Some organisations continued organising face-to-face activities in line with the demand coming from the target group (i.e. the young people themselves in the case of Gaziantep Training and Youth Association - GEGED). Some of the interviewees indicated that it was the young people who contacted them and asked if the organisation would develop any new activities in times of the pandemic. Such a demand was explained by the interviewees to emerge from the young people's need for socialisation and activation since the lockdown measures put them in a stressful and inactive situation. Accordingly, the organisations responded positively to such a demand.



GEGED's environmental project in an outdoor setting with the required safety measures.

In addition, the youth organisations themselves were also willing to respond to the perceived needs of their target group in times of the pandemic, for example of the Syrian under temporary protection children that they work for, considering that their target group was disadvantaged under the conditions created by the

pandemic, such as distance education. As an example, GEGED decided to restart its workshops with this group of children and young people in a face-to-face setting by taking all required measures against the pandemic in a way to ensure that the children could catch up with the curriculum when the schools would reopen.



GEGED's workshop with Syrian under temporary protection children in Gaziantep.

In some other cases, the organisations, for example KEGED and Pi Youth Association, took the initiative for resuming their planned face-to-face activities, by asking and confirming with the potential participants through surveys, their level of availability and willingness to attend the activity. Positive responses from the participants encouraged the organisations to continue with face-to-face activities. The interviewees indicated that the number of applicants to the activities were indeed less than usual, due to reasons such as the hesitation of the young people (or sometimes more of their parents) not to create any infection risks for their environment, or already existing coronavirus cases in the young people's households. Still, the enthusiasm of the positively responded participants helped the youth organisations decide for organising the activities. In addition, it was also reported that in cases where it was or became impossible to travel for the participant from another city to the activity, more local young people were included in the activity.

Once the decisions were taken, the key feature for the face-to-face activities was the organisation of the face-to-face activities, which actually required additional efforts from the youth organisations. As the representatives of the Pi Youth Association indicated, preparation phase of the activities took longer time. This was due to the extra efforts needed to find and prepare the physical spaces for the activity, as well as the necessity to reschedule the overall activity in line with the coronavirus measures. For example, interviewees from KEGED and Pi Youth Association stated that the programme of the activity had to be rescheduled in a more flexible way, to be able to give breaks more often, spare time for the cleaning and ventilation of the meeting rooms or cancel any open buffet food service. This means that the total amount of time planned for the activities should also be increased. In addition, the youth organisations planned and followed all the required measures such as providing masks, disinfectants, packed food etc. for the participants; and they had to find more appropriate indoor or outdoor meeting spaces that would guarantee the health safety of the participants in terms of personal distance. Those extra measures were reported to create two consequences for the youth organisations: additional and unexpected costs; and, need to cooperate with public institutions.

Interviewees indicated that adapting their face-to-face activities to the conditions of the pandemic created additional costs. For example, they had to supply protective equipment for the participants such as masks

and disinfectants; they had to reserve more hotel rooms for ensuring participants' accommodation in single rooms; they had to ask the participants to travel in single seats if they use buses; or they had to pay taxi invoices to avoid participants' use of public transportation. In addition, the situations in which some of the participants had to cancel their participation due to the pandemic related reasons, the organisations faced with financial difficulties since many arrangements were already made and had to be paid in advance (such as the accommodation and lodging arrangements). Last but not the least, the organisations faced with the risk of cancellation of the activity altogether, due to any potential last-minute measures that could have been taken by the government such as limitations to travelling or cancellation of crowded indoor meetings. Thus, it is possible to observe that the pandemic increased the financial risks for the youth organisations, which could have acted as a hindering condition for the face-to-face activities, if and when the youth organisations did not have enough budget flexibility, own resources or access to finance. The interviewees indicated that they had to find ways of overcoming such risks by searching for additional financial resources; shifting those expenditures to unexpected expenditure budget line; or, by consulting and agreeing with the donors of the activities for budget shifts. In order to avoid such risks in the future, one of interviewees recommended that a crisis management mechanism should be established to provide support for youth organisations, including the measures to facilitate receiving bank loans.

Cooperation with the public institutions, on the other hand, appears as an important supporting condition for the continuation of face-to-face activities in times of the pandemic. For the interviewed youth organisations, almost all face-to-face activities provided some examples of such a cooperation, such as benefitting from the physical facilities of the public institutions for their activities. In that sense, youth organisations were allowed to use the physical spaces of public education centres, youth centres, or meeting rooms of the ministries or municipalities, in which measures against the pandemic would be easier to follow due to the bigger size of and hygiene conditions in those facilities. In addition, the youth organisations were also in contact with the health directorates in case there were any instances of Covid-19 infections during their activities. Still, one of the interviewees stated that it was always the youth organisation which had tried to establish such a communication and cooperation; and, recommended that public institutions should benefit more from the potential and experiences of the youth organisations in particular or civil society in general, especially in times of crisis similar to that of the pandemic.

Last but not the least, as a face-to-face activity by nature, on-going and forthcoming European Solidarity Corps (ESC) volunteering projects of the youth organisations were negatively affected by the pandemic. For example, in the places where the volunteers were actively working, such as the oncology hospital in Gaziantep, the volunteering activities had to be stopped not to create additional risks for the beneficiaries. Or due to the international travel restrictions and new visa procedures, the number of new volunteers to be hosted or sent decreased. However, interviewees from Pi Youth Organisation and Gaziantep Training and Youth Association - GEGED indicated that they still managed to host and send volunteers by putting extra efforts to sustain their ESC projects. In that sense, they asked for support from the National Agencies, or they benefitted from the flexibilities in the programme introduced for the conditions of the pandemic, for example replacing incoming volunteers with local young people. Some interviewees indicated that they rearranged their strategy of identifying volunteers in a way to choose those who had some digital competences. They also restructured the daily programmes of the hosted volunteers by creating new activities for them, mostly in a digital format, in a way to foster the potentials of the volunteers in times of pandemic. Although most of the trainings for the outgoing or incoming volunteers were carried to the online platforms, some of the activities that volunteers provided, such as the language courses for young people, started to resume in a face-to-face format, by following the required pandemic measures.



GEGED's Italian language courses by the hosted ESC volunteers are taking place in a face-to-face format.

2.3. RESPONSE CATEGORY #3: LOBBYING FOR MAINSTREAMING YOUTH AS A PRIORITY

The outbreak of the pandemic mobilised many different donors in Turkey to initiate calls for projects for the civil society organisations and researchers to respond to and alleviate the negative effects of the pandemic on different segments of the society. As an umbrella organisation working for capacity development of its member youth organisations in terms of youth policy making and advocacy, Youth Organizations Forum (Go-For) worked for mainstreaming youth as a priority in such project schemes.

Explorative interviews show that during the pandemic, Go-For observed that young people were quite negatively affected by the pandemic in their daily lives, especially in the fields of education, employment, civic participation and others. In addition, the organisation also observed that during the pandemic the youth organisations' range of action was considerably narrowed down and their access to funds had been quite limited beyond the Erasmus+ and ESC Programmes. These considerations were the key aim for Go-For to get actively engaged in a lobbying activity for the inclusion of youth as a priority in some of the support schemes during the pandemic.

Lobbying youth as a priority activity was initiated by a meeting organised for the youth organisations in Turkey with the advisory council of the European Youth Forum, in which Go-For has been an observer member. The interviewees stated that upon this meeting, the European Youth Forum published a Covid-19 response on the need to prioritise youth as a priority for the donors. Bringing together their own concerns about the limited access of youth organisations to funds in Turkey with such a momentum, Go-For decided to initiate a lobbying activity with the donors in Turkey. For the Covid-19 special call for proposals entitled "Bizi Bağlayan Şeyler [Things That Connect Us]" opened by Sivil Düşün in the first weeks of the pandemic, Go-For prepared a request of information asking for the reasons of non-inclusion of youth as a priority in the call for proposals. Interviewees stated that the response from Sivil Düşün was not satisfactory for the organisation and they published a public statement on 20 May 2020 to reiterate their position and demand with regards to setting youth as a priority within the context of that special call for proposals. To take further action, Go-For had a meeting with the authorities at the Delegation of the European Union to Turkey. The interviewees stated that this meeting was influential in changing the priority areas of the special call for proposals and once the priority areas were removed, more youth organisations were observed to apply to the special call. Such a lobbying activity was reported to be influential in eliminating the negative reactions of youth organisations towards that donor and in ensuring that more youth organisations benefitted from the funds. The interviewees stated that last and recent achievement of the action was that Sivil Düşün organised an information session solely for the youth organisations.



Go-For published a public statement as a response to the social media statement of Sivil Düşün.



In the course of the pandemic, the organisation continued the lobbying activity for mainstreaming youth further with some other donors in Turkey. For example, they met with the representatives of Haklara Destek Programı⁴ on the importance of mainstreaming youth. In the meeting, Go-For presented the needs analysis reports that they prepared to compare those needs with the priorities of the donor scheme. As a result, an information session is planned to be organised by the donor for the youth organisations, which is expected to increase their fund use. Go-For also started a lobbying initiative with the Swedish Embassy, which did not include youth as a priority before in distributing its funds in Turkey.

As indicated in the interviews, all those lobbying efforts encouraged Go-For to continue with such efforts in the future. For this aim, the organisation plans to continue with its youth organisations' needs analysis activity to be able to conduct more evidence-based lobbying activities to mainstream youth in the support schemes.

⁴ Haklara Destek Programı [Support to Rights Programme] is a programme “created and maintained with the financial support of the European Union” and implemented by Hafıza Merkezi and Heinrich Böll Stiftung in Turkey.

2.4. RESPONSE CATEGORY #4: DIGITALISATION

As the pandemic seriously affected the mobility of young people and youth workers, the youth organisations started to resort into the use of online and digital instruments to sustain their regular activities and organisational functioning. The explorative interviews show that without exception all the interviewed youth organisations have benefited from and developed various online and digital instruments at different stages of the pandemic and at different densities. From the explorative interviews, it is possible to identify three different but interrelated domains in which digital and online instruments are used: the regular activities of the youth organisation; the organisational functioning of the youth organisations; and support activities to other youth organisations and youth work in general.

2.4.1. DIGITALISATION IN THE ACTIVITIES OF THE YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

The interviews show that all the youth organisations have started to transfer some of their regular activities to online and digital platforms, although some of them have also continued with the face-to-face, physical settings for their activities. The digital activities include, but are not limited to, online language and speaking clubs; online information seminars; online trainings within their on-going projects; and electronic publications. Some examples of those online activities are presented below in a way to summarise their perceived advantages and disadvantages by the respondents, as well as the methods used in those activities.

“ONLINE YOUTH SUPPORT ACTIVITIES”

Pi Youth Organisation has transferred its regular youth support activities, such as speaking clubs (in different languages), career days (as a part of personal development activities for young people) or short thematic trainings/seminars (such as the “sustainable lifestyle training”) to online platforms with the outbreak of the pandemic. Although the interviewees believed in the benefits of the physical face-to-face interaction with young people, they still wanted to continue with those activities not to lose contact with young people, to continue supporting them and to sustain organisation’s visibility. The respondents indicated that they redesigned the activities in a digital format in a way to adopt interactive methods and instruments such as Google forms, Mentimeter, Jamboard or PowerPoint in a non-formal learning setting. The interviewees stated that in this process of ensuring interactivity, they also benefitted from the experience gained in the international events that they had participated in, especially in terms of adapting non-formal education to digitalisation.



Pi Youth Organisation organises online and free-of-charge English Speaking Clubs for young people on a monthly basis.



Sustainable Lifestyle Workshop of Pi Youth Association was a free-of-charge youth support activity for four weeks in January 2021.

“ONLINE INFORMATION EVENTS”

Pi Youth Organisation, which has been organising regular information events on Erasmus+ and ESC volunteering projects, continued with this activity on the digital platforms during the pandemic. The respondents from the organisation stated that when this activity was taking place in a physical face-to-face setting, it was reaching up to 40 young people mostly based in İzmir where Pi Youth Organisation is located. Once the activity was transferred to an online platform, an advantage was the considerable expansion of the outreach of the activity, covering three-four times more young people from all over the country. However, the respondents also referred to some disadvantages of having the activity online by stating that it became difficult to implement some of the regular programme elements, such as applied motivation letter writing exercises. Thus, the programme of the information events had to shift from a more applied learning approach to a theoretical one on the digital platforms.



Erasmus+ and ESC Information Seminar of Pi Youth Organisation took place online on 20 December 2020.

“ONLINE LANGUAGE COURSES/WORKSHOPS”

The language courses provided by the ESC volunteers of Gaziantep Youth and Training Association (GEGED) were carried to the online platforms during the pandemic. The innovative aspect of such a transfer is the integration of an already existing digital system, namely Duolingo (a language-learning website and mobile application) into the language courses of GEGED. The respondents indicated that a former volunteer of the organisation initiated and helped for such a cooperation with Duolingo, providing an additional technical

infrastructure for the online activities.

During the pandemic, this language course activity via Duolingo further gained an international and interactive character. The interviewees indicated that they also communicated with their partners in Europe and upon their positive approach, the activity was redesigned as a weekly activity with the participation of partners from 12 countries. Eventually, the activity went beyond a language course and transformed into a workshop to provide more space for discussion and interaction of a multinational group of young people. The respondents stated that with a rotating moderation system between the young people from the participating countries, each week a theme such as human rights, children's rights, environment, climate change, refugees etc. was identified. The participants of the activity were required to make prior preparation for the themes and during the events, different positions were identified and opened to discussion in a way to leave the initiative to the young people.



During the pandemic, European Solidarity Corps volunteers of GEGED provided online language courses/workshops to young people.

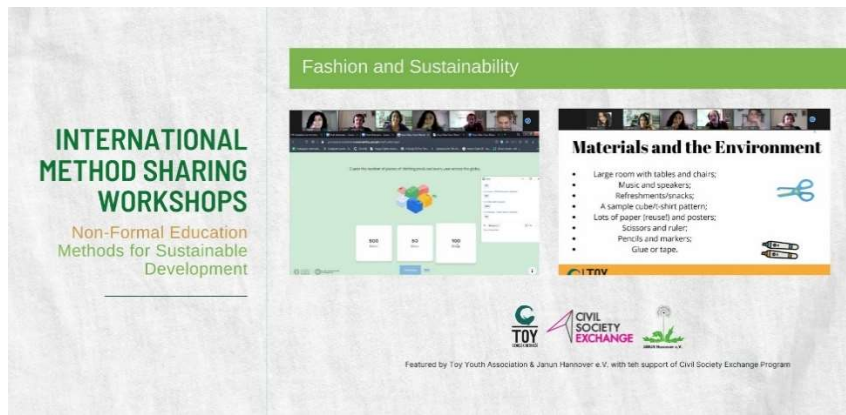
“ON-GOING ACTIVITIES GO ONLINE”

“Üstünüze Afiyet” is a local initiative of Toy Youth Organisation, implemented between 2016-2019 through Second Hand Exchange Bazaars and Food Upcycling Buffets. The aim of the initiative was to raise awareness about environmental sustainability and waste policy and to fight against consumerism among young people by organising events for free of charge and equal value exchange of goods and upcycling rather than wasting. However, as the respondents indicated, together with the pandemic, organisation of face-to-face, physical activities for “Üstünüze Afiyet, such as the Bazaars, became impossible to implement, and Toy Youth Organisation searched for opportunities of transforming the activity into online awareness raising and advocacy activities.



Üstünüze Afiyet initiative has organised Second Hand Exchange Bazaars and Food Upcycling Buffets for the young people.

In this context, Toy Youth Organisation together with its partner organisation from Germany, Janun Hannover e.V., designed a project, funded by the Civil Society Exchange Programme⁵ in 2021. The project entitled “International Method Sharing Workshops” aims to create an online venue for sharing non-formal education methods in the field of sustainable development and youth work. In addition to the workshops, a planned outcome of the project isto create a collective and open-source manual. The themes of the workshops are identified as sustainable consumption, fashion and sustainability, nutrition, nature education for children and youngsters, and climate change and climate justice. The interviewees indicated that this project was also considered as a first step to initiate and discuss how advocacy campaigns can be implemented through online platforms by including young people into the activities.



International Method Sharing Workshops aim to develop non-formal education methods for Sustainable Development.

In addition, Toy Youth Organisation (TOY) also transferred some of its activities within the context of its different on-going projects into online/digital settings. In the context of its “Youth Work Academy” project funded by Sabancı Foundation Grant Programme, the last two out of total four training camps were held online. In addition, within the context of the project, a Visual Tool Box⁶ was prepared as short YouTube videos to present a variety of youth work instruments and methods for the youth workers to benefit from in their future activities. The videos have started to be broadcasted in December 2020, and to ensure inclusiveness, all the videos have audio description, subtitles and sign language.



Toy Youth Association, Youth Work Academy, Tool Box: “Find your position.”⁷

⁵ Civil Society Exchange is “a programme designed for civil society organizations from Turkey and Europe”, supporting “the idea of a unified Europe through cross-border cooperation”. <https://civilsocietyexchange.org/>.

⁶ Visual Tool Box is available at TYO’s YouTube Channel in a playlist at: https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLnDwP2RISRTUU40Qn6xz_cVL8aFy2cuK.

⁷ Available at: <https://youtu.be/t5bE8cLZR2o>.

2.4.2. DIGITALISATION FOR THE ORGANISATIONAL FUNCTIONING

The interviews show that use of online and digital instruments in times of pandemic have been quite functional for the youth organisations to sustain their organisations' daily working routines. Two examples of the impact of digitalisation on the organisational functioning of the interviewed youth organisations are the online team meetings and digital archives.

“ONLINE TEAM MEETINGS”

Although some of the team members of the interviewed organisations continued to meet physically during the pandemic as much as the measures allowed them, all of the interviewed youth organisations have also developed new routines of online team meetings. In that sense, an observation is that some of the organisations, which have already started to purchase and use digital instruments before the pandemic, have been more advantageous in this process since they had developed an infrastructure and got acquainted with the digital instruments in advance. In addition, some organisations were not only prepared in terms of equipment and know-how, but also have already worked on developing an understanding of digital democratic participation even before the pandemic started. For those youth organisation, it is possible to argue that the pandemic has accelerated the process of adaptation to the digitalisation trend.

For some other youth organisations, which seemed to be less prepared for a digital transformation before the pandemic, a hindering condition appeared to be the lack of technical infrastructure. Although organisations tried to adapt to the online and digital instruments rather quickly, lack of resources and lack of know-how were the challenges to overcome in time. In this sense, using free-of-charge or less costly online platforms, sharing equipment with or borrowing equipment from other organisations or individuals, and/or searching for additional resources (mostly within the budgets of the on-going projects) have been the major methods to overcome these challenges.

“DIGITAL ARCHIVE”

The explorative interviews show that those youth organisations, which have already established their digital archives benefitted a lot from it during the pandemic. For example, interviewees from the Pi Youth Organisation indicated that when the pandemic started, they felt lucky because they already had experience with the digital tools in terms of their digital e-mail and archive system. Digital storage of the documents such as statute of the association, circular of signature, project forms, contact lists etc. enabled the youth organisations to access those documents from wherever they were, and this ensured sustainability of their organisational functioning almost without any interruption due to the pandemic. Thus, preservation of knowledge digitally, for example in the cloud systems, helped ensuring continuity in terms of knowledge sharing in a way to strengthen the organisational memory. The interviewees also indicated that they also realised the need to keep the digital archives in a more well-organised way even to be used actively after the pandemic.



2.4.3. DIGITALISATION TO SUPPORT YOUTH WORK

The interviewed youth organisations did not only continue with their own activities and established their own online working routines in the digital platforms, but they have also developed new and innovative digital instruments to support the youth workers, youth organisations and youth work in general. An observation in this regard is that to the extent that the mobility of young people, hence the amount of activities with young people, decreased with the pandemic, some of the interviewed youth organisations have shifted their agendas towards more rights-based, support activities for youth work in general provided through digital instruments.

“VERSUS”

Due to the limitations to mobility of, and organising physical activities with young people, TOY Youth Organisation decided to produce supportive content for youth workers in the course of the pandemic, in addition to their already on-going activities. “Versus” is a video series designed and prepared by the organisation and broadcasted live on YouTube⁸ from 6 June to 26 August 2020.

“Versus” aimed at providing a virtual space for different approaches and perspectives to the same questions that youth workers come across in their daily youth work practices. Acknowledging that there is not only one answer/approach in youth work, the videos were designed to bring two experienced youth workers, researchers in the youth field or trainers together around a particular topic to express their own and sometimes contradictory positions against each other. The topics that were brought to discussion throughout the 10 episodes of Versus are rights-based youth work, international youth mobility, youth and sports, youth and experience, volunteering, participation (with)in youth organisations, youth work, youth and learning, youth worker, and localisation in youth work. Each video is 70-90 minutes long, including not only the input from the speakers, but also interactive questions of the viewers and responses to them in a moderated way.



Versus #7: Youth Work⁹

The interviewees reported that the idea of producing Versus emerged from the general and critical overview of the organisation with regards to the abundance and actual content of live broadcasts and videos produced in an increasing speed during the first months of the pandemic. Considering their limited coverage (for example information sessions about the Erasmus+ Programme in general) and limited use of technology (for example non-interactive videos with no chat option), the representatives of the organisation came up with the idea to go beyond such content and designs. A specific team in the

⁸ Versus series are available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBoyVKppKZr2jbs1jfTAjuA>.

⁹ Available at: <https://youtu.be/XuNOAprTgMQ>.

organisation blended their own digital competences with the idea of providing original contents in order to produce different and more attractive instruments to support youth workers in particular, and youth work in general. Versus was produced within own technical, digital and financial capacity of the organisation.



Versus #8: Youth and Learning¹⁰

The representatives of the organisation consider Versus as an important input to the digital archive/memory of youth work. Its interactive characteristic enabled the viewers to get engaged into the discussion through surveys and questions. It is also considered as an “ever green” instrument, which is accessible for anybody who is interested in or working within the youth field. The respondents also mentioned that two important outcomes of Versus have been the increase in the visibility of the organisation and in the technical and digital capacity of the organisation.

¹⁰ Available at: <https://youtu.be/krhcox7qs3Y>.

2.5. RESPONSE CATEGORY #5: DEVELOPING NEW PROJECTS ON THE EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC ON YOUNG PEOPLE

Due to their active engagement with youth people and youth work during the pandemic, the interviewed youth organisations are observed to be able to develop an understanding of the versatile challenges that the pandemic created for the young people in a differential way. The interviewees from KEGED indicated that the potential of the pandemic to transform the lives of young people in particular, and the world in which they live in general, inevitably necessitated them to think about the post-pandemic period, with all the differences, advantages and disadvantages that it would bring together. In this process, the interviewees stated that it would be first the young people who should be heard.

With the aim of contributing to a viable vision of post-pandemic and global and local responses to that vision, KEGED prepared a KA347 - Structured Dialogue project, entitled “Post-Pandemic Youth Adaptation Scenarios Project”¹¹, funded by the Turkish National Agency of the Erasmus+ and ESC Programmes. The project is developed and to be implemented in cooperation with Malatya Yeşilyurt Municipality, Nişantaşı University and Sivil Yaşam Derneği (Civil Life Association).



“Post-Pandemic Youth Adaptation Scenarios Project” is a KA347 - Structured Dialogue funded by the Turkish National Agency of the Erasmus+ and ESC Programmes.

Acknowledging the difficulty of predicting the post-pandemic period, the project aims to develop, and discuss together with the young people in a multifaceted way, future scenarios on how youth adaptation is required. The project does not only aim to prepare young people to post-pandemic conditions, but also to help them think about and initiate options and opportunities for their future. In that sense, the project focuses on the fields of entrepreneurship; education; social, political and civic participation; and, communication channels and communication strategies.

Empowering youth to develop policy options in those fields is particularly prioritised within the project. In that sense, adaptation scenarios are to be presented to the policy makers to be able to show them how new policies should be developed from a youth perspective, and how steps should be taken for youth by taking the needs and opinions of the young people into account.

There will be three training sessions and a forum activity within the project, where different scenarios will be developed. Each training will bring together 30 different young people to develop their scenarios and

¹¹ More information about the project can be found at: <https://www.keged.org.tr/blog/pandemi-sonrasi-genclik-adaptasyonu-senaryolari-projesi-14122>.

share them with the participants of the next training. The interviewees believe that in this way, each new group of young people will have the opportunity to discuss, develop further and sometimes to refute the scenarios produced by the previous group. In that sense, the production of the youth adaptation scenarios is planned as a cumulative and deliberative process. In the final event, the Forum, all the participants will come together and evaluate the policies, strategies and scenarios developed by the young people with the participation of the decision makers.

The interviewees from KEGED stated that the project meetings will take place in a face-to-face, physical setting in three different provinces, İstanbul, Ankara and Malatya. The first training is to take place in April 2021.



"Last selfie with the pandemic."

3. GENERAL OVERVIEW

It is obvious that the pandemic has considerably affected everybody in the world, and the interviewed youth organisations in Turkey were not an exception. The interviewed organisations had to deal with the problems such as those emerged as a result of limitations to mobility, lock-down measures, ban of general assembly meetings and financial difficulties. However, a brief overview of the explorative interviews show that the interviewed organisations have also proved to be quite skilful in coping with those negative effects and have successfully developed youth work responses to overcome the problems of young people as their target groups, to sustain their activities and organisational functioning, and to support and cooperate with youth workers and other youth organisations throughout the pandemic.

The pandemic has created some new and unfamiliar working conditions for the youth organisations. The interviews show that interviewed youth organisations have activated their potential to adapt themselves to those changing conditions and to develop new ways of youth work provision. In that sense, they have adopted new agendas on the basis of their perception on the emerging needs of the young people; they have acquired new skills, such as online/digital skills; they have enhanced their crisis management mechanisms; and, they have diversified their funding prospects. A brief analysis across all case studies in Turkey makes it possible to categorise four main interrelated reasons for the success of the youth organisations' youth work responses to the pandemic.

Engagement: The interviewed youth organisations were engaged with young people before the pandemic, and have managed to remain engaged with them during the pandemic. At the beginning of the pandemic, one of the first reactions of the interviewed organisations was to refer to their target groups and beneficiaries in a way to develop an informed awareness and knowledge about their needs and problems. They did not only use traditional methods such as surveys, but they also developed new tools (such as problem map and documentary) to identify the needs and demands of young people to make them visible.

Institutional capacities: The interviewed youth organisations have already had institutional capacities to develop responses to the pandemic. After a short period of shock and inactivity, the interviewed youth organisations have mobilised their human resources and technical capacity to resume their youth work activities, meaning that institutionalisation has helped for the creation of immediate responses. In that sense, the teams in the youth organisations undertook the responsibility of putting the activities back in track; rescheduling and redesigning the on-going activities for the forthcoming months; developing new activities and new working themes to cope with the impact of the pandemic; adopting new (online and digital) instruments; so that they have actively continued working under the extraordinary conditions of the pandemic. All these show that more institutionalised youth organisations have shown a high adaptation capacity to the conditions created by the pandemic. The youth organisations which have already included digitalisation in their agendas before the pandemic or have already developed organisational digital support mechanisms such as digital archives, have been successful in managing the process. Still, even those youth organisations acknowledged that digitalisation was sometimes underestimated in terms of the efforts it may necessitate, as digitalisation require them to go beyond the sole ownership of equipment, and further develop technical capacity and know-how in terms of adapting a new understanding for digital activities. Last but not the least, more institutionalised youth organisations could also develop crisis management mechanisms when they faced with financial difficulties due to the pandemic and achieved access to different funds for the new activities.

Flexibility: The interviewed youth organisations have benefitted from flexibility to be able to sustain their activities. Flexibility relates both to their institutional capacities, and capacities of their donors or

international organisations to rearrange the mechanisms of their support. On the one hand, owing to their institutional capacities, the interviewed youth organisations have internally managed to reorganise their work, their activities and their human resources under quite unstable conditions. On the other hand, they have also asked for and received the consent from their donors for flexible implementation of their rules in their on-going projects. Flexibility in general has helped the youth organisations to make shifts in terms of the form of activities (for example from face-to-face to online), in terms of the participants of the activities (for example less or more participants) and in terms of project costs (for example shifts between budget lines).

Cooperation: The interviewed youth organisations have also put efforts for cooperation and solidarity in the course of the pandemic, not only for the existing activities but also for future activities. For the on-going activities, new venues of cooperation with the public institutions in their localities enhanced the opportunities for the continuation of activities in a way to benefit from the larger facilities and richer resources of the public institutions. They have also cooperated with and/or shared their resources with other youth organisations, both in terms of know-how and technical equipment, which was a factor to create an enabling environment for youth work. They mobilised their already established contacts with experts and network in the youth field for the new activities in a way to enrich the content they produced. They have also communicated and cooperated with their existing international/European partners both to ensure continuation of existing activities; developing them further; or designing new activities together.

Considering the fact that not all the youth organisations have gone through similar experiences in Turkey, those success factors can also be taken as an opportunity to point out to the areas in which youth organisations in particular and youth work in general should be further supported. In that sense, capacity building towards a more institutionalised, sustainable organisational structure and functioning seems to remain as an important priority. Secondly, more support to youth organisations with regards to digitalisation as a trend, which is expected to continue even in the post-pandemic period, would be beneficial for all the youth organisations, even for the more experienced youth organisations. Such support should not only consist of technical trainings and equipment support; but also enhance provision of non-formal education and youth work practices with digitalisation. Thirdly, the youth organisations should be supported to develop their crisis management mechanisms further in a way to minimise the negative impact of any potential risks on youth work in the future. Such a support can also include adoption of some degree of flexibility in implementation of youth support schemes for all the donors, including the Erasmus+ and ESC Programmes, both at the programme level or at its the national level implementation.