**OHCHR-Study on the impact of the Covid-19-pandemic on human rights of young people – Human Rights Council Resolution 48/12 - Questionnaire**

**Question 1 - the main challenges that young people face in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic:**

Regarding the **rights of children** as guaranteed by the UN-Convention on the rights of the child the following rights are concerned:

The rights of children to meet and build groups (Art. 15), on receiving child care outside the home (Art. 18), protection from every form of violence or neglect (Art. 19), on healt and access to health services (Art. 24, 25), social services and a living-standard in accordance with their personal development (Art. 26, 27), of education with the aspects of equal oportunity and development of their personalities (Art. 28, 29), of the right to play, enjoy leisure activities appropriate to their age and take part in cultural activities (Art. 31).

**Children and young people** are particularly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the protective measures taken by the authorities. For many young people, this circumstance has delayed their independence and self-positioning on the way to adult life. The measures taken to combat the pandemic and prevent the spread of the disease, the restrictions from leaving the home and periodical lockdowns as well as the closure of schools, and pre-school institutions, have, according to child and youth workers and psychologists, lead to psychological problems, learning difficulties and educational setbacks of many children, due to their increased isolation.

In particular, young people from socially disadvantaged and so-called educationally disadvantaged families as well as children and young people with a migration background had more problems coping with independent learning at home. Home schooling or distance learning, social isolation and the associated loneliness, family tensions and not meeting friends have been shown to cause an increase in mental illnesses among young people.

The increased responsibility of parents for child care and educational support of their children has lead to many parents being incapable of coping adequately, leading to different forms of domestic violence against their children.

The Austrian National Youth Council conducted a survey on the effects of Covid-19 on children and young people in the context of youth work. 200 youth workers took part. Results show the great importance of extracurricular **child and youth work** - see <https://bjv.at/portfolio-items/jugendumfrage-lockdown-generation/>

The Federal Chancellery provides regularly updated recommendations/guidelines for extracurricular youth work online https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/service/coronavirus/coronavirus-infos-familien-und-jugend/jugendarbeit.html

In order to serve the information needs of young people in the Corona crisis, the **Austrian Youth Information** is relying on digital youth information offers with which they can reach hundred thousands of young people.

The pandemic has shown that it is particularly necessary to provide good and reliable information. “Fake news” and “conspiracy theories” in particular represent a major challenge. The Federal Chancellery and its partners have therefore focused on expanding youth-relevant information on COVID-19 and the measures taken by the federal government. A central youth information page -specifically for young people - on COVID-19 was set up on the Austrian Youth Portal. When choosing information, the focus is on the specific questions of young people in Austria. - https://www.jugendportal.at/corona

**Question 2 - measures of the government to support young people and ensure their rights:**

On January 12, 2022, the federal government decided on an immediate educational package for young people. This includes, among other things, extensive financial support for the areas of learning support for apprentices, pupils, psychosocial health, sport and exercise as well as the promotion of cohesion at school. (<https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/dam/jcr:06cd9142-79ed-4fc1-9db2-12d3f283f108/2_21_mrv.pdf>)

***a. right to work and social security (including, for example, to address the job loss, reduction of working hours, wage cut, etc.)***

As far as financial and labour-law related measures for families, young people and children are to be mentioned, these were the followings:

To financially assist family with children and young people that have, as a result of the COVID-19 crisis and especially because of unemployment or a reduction of the extent of their work, have fallen into financially difficult situations, a **family hardship fund** was created in the Federal Chancellery, Department of Family and Youth. This fund was provided with 200 Million Euros, with which 130,000 families would be assisted, with an average of 1,300 Euros per family. This fund was intended until the end of 2021. About 30 % of the applications received were submitted by lone parents.

In the first year of the crisis a **family crisis fund** was created from which 100 Euros was paid out to families for every child, if the parents were unemployed on 28/2/2020 and received unemployment or emergency benefits.

All families who were entitled to the family allowance between March 2020 and February 2021 for at least one month but who then lost this entitlement, the entitlement was extended automatically until March 2021. In September 2020 an additional **child bonus** of 360 Euros was paid out for every child for which family allowance is received. This bonus was paid out together with the family allowance.

To alleviate the burdens of child care, each parent was entitled to three weeks **special child care time** as a legal claim or per voluntary agreement and in place until 31 December 2021. The costs to the employers for this measure were reimbursed by the federal government.

Lone parents, who did not receive the full amount of alimony from the other parent to which they were entitled for under-aged children, received easier access to **advance maintenance payments** from the family burden compensation fund.

In 2022, families who have to pay taxes are supported further in that the **Family Bonus Plus** and also the tax credit (Kindermehrbetrag) for families with low incomes or no tax duty are increased.

***b. right to education (including in the context of the closure of educational institutions and transition to online learning)***

Within the **school textbook programme** school books free of charge and financed in the frame of the family burden compensation fund are provided to pupils which gives all pupils equal access to education and contributes to relieving the financial burden on parents. Per year, each school is given a certain budget based on the number of pupils and type of school to individually order the school books they are in need of.

As for some school books there have been existing **digital supplementary materials** for quite some time, introducing a new development for the secondary level of two hybrid version of school books since 2016, with an annual budget of € 2 Mio. These versions contain printed textbook in combination with digital school books and are named „Book inclusive E-Book“ and „Book and E-BOOK+“. While the „E-Book“-version is a digital copy of the textbook with additions to take notes and mark certain text passages, the „E-BOOK+“-version consists, next to the digital copy, of additional interactive and multimedia content like e.g. language grammar exercises or explanatory videos.

To boost the availability of digital school books, there have been implemented several policies in Austria recently:

The annual budget which is reserved for digital school books only is increased in 2021 to € 7 Mio. and in 2022 to € 8.5 Mio., while the majority of this special budget is reserved for secondary level 1. Although this budget is reserved especially for digital school books, additionally they can be financed through the regular budget for school books as well which annually amounts to € 130,6 Mio. Starting with 2022 there will be introduced two new versions of digital school books to choose from: the „E-Book Solo“ and the „E-BOOK+ Solo“, which are digital stand alone versions of the hybrid versions.

***c. right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health (including with the increase in domestic violence and abuse, anxiety and depression, stress caused by social isolation, etc.)***

As one of the measures, the Federal Chancellery, the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection and the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research cooperate close to meet the challenges the pandemic had on mental health among young people. Therefore high-level **working groups** have been established.

**Measures for the prevention of violence:**

The **„Platform against domestic violence“** serves as an instrument for connecting organisations providing assistance, as a wide forum for sharing experience and as a contribution towards public awareness. This platform covers different areas, including violence amongst young people.

Every federal state annually funds youth organisations carrying out projects against violence. These NGOs work together against violence and on interventions with the following objectives: Reducing violence; Increasing the rate of uncovering cases; Introducing interventions efficiently; Raise awareness and sensitization. During the Corona pandemic, these organisations became involved in the special area of supporting young people as well.

As an example the organisation „Equalize - Mädchenzentrum Klagenfurt“ can be mentioned with the regional project 2021: “Gender sensitive violence prevention aiming at diverse groups of young people, taking their changed digital and analog living-environments due to the pandemic into account – networking, knowledge-transfers, exchange of information”.

In addition, the **website** of the Federal Chancellery www.gewaltinfo.at, provides elaborate information about violence in one’s social proximity. Articles on a specific subject are published each month. For instance, in December 2021 in the area of youth: preventing violence online and offline during the pandemic: experience from the project Yes we do - Together against violent environments of girls \* and women\*of the association EqualiZ – diverse together”. This website contributes towards preventing violence by providing information and raising awareness. It should also facilitate giving and seeking help. A range of hotlines are provided on the homepage.

**Parent Education:**

The area of parental education in the Federal Chancellery – Department for Family and Youth – provides information to support parents in their parenting skills and to support families to cope with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The website of the Federal Chancellery www.eltern-bildung.at is available.

**Special topics** were created for adults to combat the negative psychosocial effects of the Corona crisis on children and young people:

Dealing with temporary loss of contact – I miss you so! To cope with the social distancing during lockdown; Learning under special circumstances, such as distance learning during lockdown; Mastering crises with children; Psychological illnesses of children; Lone parents in crisis situations.

Current **news items** on the homepage of www.eltern-bildung.at aim at supporting families and by doing so contribute to counteracting the negative psychosocial effects of the Corona crisis on children and young people. During the last lockdown period, the frequency of these news items was increased from once a week to numerous times per week. These items can be accessed for three months. For example:

„Strengthening and getting up during times of Corona“; Information for young people: „what you can do during stress“; „Which books help through the pandemic?“; „Free online workshop series ‚Taking care of one another“; „Family tips „Strengthening young people in difficult times“; „Help online for young people who experience stress“; „Tip for parents for providing psychosocial support to children and young people“; „Book tip for children from the age of 4 about coping during the Corona crisis and information about the child vaccination against Corona“.

The **subject information** pertaining to parental education of the Federal Chancellery provide weekly articles for parent-child group-leaders, seminar leaders in parental education and other interested experts, which they can use in their work with parents. Thereby parental education experts are made aware of presentations and events focusing on helping children and young people in families. For example:

„Online annual general meeting of the Association for Psychological Health in Early Childhood on „Crises?! – Its form, challenges, solutions“; „The Fund’s further education´ Healthy Austria: „Furthering resilience of children and young people“; Hybrid symposium on the effects of Corona on the health of children and young people; Reports about the health of children and young people 2021.

In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, In order to determine the attitudes of parents to upbringing norms and especially violence in the upbringing of children, a representative **online survey** was carried out by the Federal Chancellery, Department of Family and Youth, Division of Childrens’ Rights, in 2021 with parents of under-aged children. This survey on violence in upbringing is carried out regularly. One result was that the heighted stress brought on by the pandemic has not had any effect on the upbringing style or use of violence of most parents. Most parents were also of the opinion that exceptional circumstances, such as the pandemic, should not lead to less attention being paid to and time spent with the children.

***d. right to participate meaningfully in political and public affairs (including in connection with the prohibition of gatherings and transition to online rallies)***

As part of the Austrian Youth Strategy, each federal ministry developed and defined one or more national “youth objective(s)” within its own sphere of competence. Based on the experiences of the COVID-19-pandemic, a common, cross-sectorial youth objective for dealing with crises was developed. The focus is on strengthening the self-efficacy of young people, among other things by strengthening youth participation.