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**LIMITE**

**JEUN**

WORKING PAPER

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**NOTE**

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From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Informal high-level videoconference of European Union Ministers of Youth on the impact of COVID-19 on the Youth Sector (Tuesday, 19 May 2020) - Background paper

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Delegations will find attached the Presidency background paper with a view to the Informal high-level videoconference of Ministers of Youth on 19 May 2020.

**Informal high-level videoconference of European Union Ministers of Youth on the  
impact of COVID-19 on the Youth Sector**

**19 May 2020; 15:30 – 18:30**

**- Presidency background paper -**

While the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced our society in many different aspects, saving lives and protecting the health of all citizens remains the first priority.

Many countries have already introduced new, extraordinary measures resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic that have consequently affected the lives and work of people in the European Union and all over the world.

Young people and youth organisations are one of the society groups most affected by COVID-19, and the negative side-effects of the pandemic can already be identified. Further consequences can also be expected, such as those in terms of mobility and youth participation in decision-making processes and in implementation of various solidarity activities.

A more restrictive lifestyle due to the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted young people to take more action as a response to the current situation. Most of the work is being done at home, mostly by using different digital tools. Projects and programs that were planned during the spring and summer, such as exhibitions, conferences, trainings and workshops, meetings and many others, are postponed or, in the best-case scenarios, available online. The COVID-19 crisis also hindered the regular implementation of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps activities.

Due to the pandemic, more and more young people have limited access to different services. At the same time, opportunities for active participation of young people have also been reduced. Furthermore, due to the economic crisis triggered by the COVID-19 lockdown, many young people are currently facing job loss, unstable employment, pay cuts and precarious working conditions.

Moreover, different measures of self-isolation and social distancing, including limited movement due to confinement measures, have changed the daily routine of young people radically, leaving them very little time to adjust to this new reality and, at the same time, posing a risk to their physical and mental health. Insecurity, anxiety, fear of becoming ill or witnessing their loved ones getting sick can easily influence a young person's mental health. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure that all young people in need have access to adequate psycho-social services and counselling.

This said, the context of this global crisis caused by COVID-19 pandemic could be also used as a platform to create opportunities for young people to take the initiative and to contribute to the community by showing their creativity and developing different innovative ideas. It is necessary to motivate them to get involved in the available community activities and solidarity projects, as well as to support them and to invite them to share their knowledge and skills within the community. It is also crucial to raise awareness of young people of the importance of inter-generational solidarity in such difficult situations and to encourage them to help those who are most at risk of becoming ill.

Youth organizations have shown great resilience to the current situation and have been able to adapt to new working conditions by supporting their community and developing new methods to mitigate pandemic measures. These include, for example, virtual formats of mobility activities, webinars for youth workers, launching on-line portals as well as engaging young people in various educational, cultural, awareness raising and leisure time initiatives and promoting strong social activism and volunteering.

Nevertheless, predictable funding still represents the biggest challenge for youth organizations, which is why it is important for Member States to continue supporting youth organizations and their work.

The Member States and the European Commission are already addressing this new reality. The European Commission's efforts in providing different opportunities for participants and participating organizations within Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps, such as extension of application deadlines and project implementation period due to '*force majeure*', are more than welcome.

Furthermore, the youth-related challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis have been mainstreamed in the ongoing Council work, for instance in the *Council Conclusions on Raising Opportunities for Young People in Rural and Remote Areas*. Important aspects for young people in times of crises have been emphasised, such as volunteering and solidarity activities which can strengthen the resilience of communities; or promotion of digital education and training, including facilitating access to internet in order to mitigate negative effects of isolation. The exchanges between the Member States on the draft Council Conclusions continued successfully and the Presidency is thankful to the Member States for their contribution.

Having in mind all the above and additionally stressing the need for even more increased cross-sectoral cooperation, the Presidency has decided to organise a high-level videoconference where Youth Ministers can exchange information, experiences and ideas which could help our joint search for solutions.

In addition, in order to have a first-hand insight of the youth organisation addressing the needs of young people during the pandemic, the Presidency would like to invite a young person (*ibc*) as an introductory speaker in the first part of our exchange of views.

Taking into account the measures and initiatives already undertaken in the Member States and at EU level, the Presidency invites you to consider the following issues in your interventions:

1. *How has COVID-19 affected young people's access to services (including health and counselling); digital tools, youth participation and employment opportunities?*
2. *What measures can be taken at national and EU level to support the youth sector in areas affected by COVID-19 pandemic?*

The outcomes of this ministerial discussion will be taken into account in remaining work of the Presidency, further reflecting in the timely update of the existing COVID-19 questionnaire as one of the tools for a successful exchange of views between Member States.

Last but not least, at the end of the videoconference the incoming German Presidency will present its priorities and programme for the second semester of 2020.