

Covid

Screenagers

Socially distant, digitally close

Study of the impact of Covid-19 on
youth in Western Balkan

Study report: Montenegro

November 2021



Acknowledgements

Special thanks to all of the young people who took time to participate in ***Covid Screenagers: Socially Distant, Digitally Close*** study and share their views, opinions, and experience. Above all, thanks to ninety bright-eyed, imaginative and promising young people across the six Western Balkan countries who helped us to shape this research.

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Foreword

We are delighted to introduce **Covid Screenagers: Socially Distant, Digitally Close.**

The world has been a particularly unwelcoming and unfair place for younger generations in 2020-21, with the Covid-19 pandemic interrupting their development, education, employment, and social life at a scale never seen before. Young people in the six Western Balkan countries are not an exception. To protect the most vulnerable segments of societies across the Western Balkan region, we all asked young people to sacrifice their dreams and ambitions. We asked them to give up on gaining new knowledge and skills, advancing their careers, travelling abroad and meeting new cultures, experiencing the dating scene, and seeking lifelong partners. It made their lives sometimes physically painful, and most of all hurtful to the soul: and we need to listen. This collection of reports is the British Council's effort to listen, report young people's thoughts, challenges, concerns, and suggest a call for action.

This research shows the heavy toll that the pandemic has wrought on young people in the Western Balkans. It reports the magnitude of the pandemic's adverse impacts on the youth's access to and quality of education, livelihoods and employment, mental health, social relations, and their future outlook. Additionally, the research found that negative impacts were unevenly distributed across diverse and complex youth populations in the Western Balkans. Those segments of the youth population who had already been disadvantaged before the pandemic were hit even harder by it.

The research findings indicate the strong resilience of youth in the Western Balkan region. Their core personal network consisting of family, friends, and romantic partners has persevered throughout the pandemic, as a significant share of them reported that those relationships have improved. Moreover, most of them managed to adjust to an increasingly online world, and they used the internet not only to keep in touch with people but also to make new acquaintances. One of the young research participants noted that it might be that we were socially distant but digitally close.

A silver lining in the research is youth's attitudes towards the environment. The overwhelming majority of young people across the region said that the pandemic made them more aware of climate change challenges. Moreover, two-thirds of them reported starting to practise environmentally friendly behaviour as a result of the pandemic; this

is a great source of hope for the challenges to come.

All these findings are fascinating, and we hope they will be useful to stakeholders across the Western Balkans, the UK and beyond. The research is also vital for the British Council, and it will inform and guide our work for the years ahead.

Our role is to build connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and the Western Balkans through arts and culture, education and the English language. A central objective for us is to design and run programmes that meet the needs and aspirations of young people, and support their personal, social and economic development, and promote open and inclusive societies. The British Council's work in the Western Balkan countries always starts with partnerships and results in mutually beneficial outcomes. This report helps us respond precisely to what we hear from those we want to connect with the most.

The report provides a snapshot of a distinct period of the Covid-19 pandemic through the eyes of young people. It is a testimony to the most extraordinary year most of us will ever live through. I would like to thank the research team, who worked hard to bring this report to you. Above all, I would like to thank ninety bright-eyed, imaginative and promising young people across the six Western Balkan countries who helped us shape this research.

I hope you enjoy this report as much as I have. What it teaches us will echo in our work and lives in the months and years to come.

Milan Gnjidić

Head of Education, Society and Governance Contracts, Western Balkans

Report overview

The pandemic of Covid-19 has profoundly changed realities worldwide, but the ways it has affected various population groups are diverse. It is known that young people (aged 18-29) are in a fragile position in societies as this life stage is marked by multiple transitions in their course of life: from education to the labour market, from living with parents to independent living or starting their own family. Even in pre-Covid-19 social contexts, these transitions were coupled with a less favourable socio-economic position of young people (compared to older age groups), manifested through lower and insecure or low paid employment.

In order to understand how the Covid-19 pandemic influenced different aspects of life and the socioeconomic position of young people, the British Council conducted a study in six Western Balkan countries. This report is part of this study and presents key findings about the impacts of the pandemic on young people in Montenegro. The report is structured as follows:

The methodology and approach section provides an overview of the study background, its purposes and the study development process. It describes the main quantitative and qualitative methods used in collecting and analysing data.

Section one, **Impacts on youth livelihoods and employment**, examines the magnitude of the pandemic's impact on the economic standing of young people. It starts by exploring the impacts on young people's income and ability to pay for basic expenses during the pandemic. It then examines adverse pandemics' consequences on job loss and labor market opportunities. Finally, it extends the analysis to changes in the "world of work."

Section two, **Impacts on education**, explores students' personal experience of education during the pandemic. It examines four broad thematic areas: access to education, quality of education, social aspects of educational experience, and skills needed for the post-Covid future.

Section three, **Impact on mental wellbeing and behaviours**, looks at mental health and wellbeing dimensions of the young people's experiences of the pandemic. It starts by examining changes in young people's behavioral patterns. It then looks at the pandemic's impacts on young people's feelings. This is followed by reviewing young people's coping strategies for preserving mental wellbeing and

utilizing professional mental health support during the pandemic.

Section four, **Young people's views on society and social relations** explores youth views on social issues of greatest importance to them during the pandemic. It starts with exploring young people's opinions of the pandemic's impact on their relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners. It then turns to their experience of discrimination and violence during the pandemic. It is followed by exploring young people's views on broader social issues and their social activism.

Section five, **Trust in and perceptions of media coverage during the crisis** examines young people's trust in media and their views about the media coverage of the pandemic. First, it looks at young people's Covid-19 information sources and confidence in specific media sources related to Covid-19 information. It then explores the assessment of media coverage of Covid-19 by young people.

Section six, **Young people's views on the government's response to the crisis** examine the extent to which young people have supported the government's handling of the crisis. It starts by looking at the support of three key policies: lockdown measures, public health guidelines (i.e., wearing masks), and mandatory immunization. It then explores the assessment of government measures from the standpoint of young people's needs, concerns, and interests during the pandemic.

Section seven, **Future outlook: hopes, concerns, and aspirations**, looks at the future. First, it covers youth's expectations on the impact of the pandemic on their long-term and short-term future. Then, it looks at the expected changes in their behavioral patterns/practices. Finally, it concludes with a list of government measures that young people think would benefit them the most to deal with the pandemic's negative impact.

Methodology and approach

Study background

Covid Screenagers: Socially Distant, Digitally Close is a study that amplifies the voices of 7,271 young people between the ages of 18 and 29 who have lived through the Covid-19 pandemic in six countries in the Western Balkan region (Albania, BiH, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia). The study tells the story of how the pandemic has had an adverse impact on so many aspects of young people's lives—their education, employment and livelihoods, mental well-being, family and partnership relations, broader social relations, and their future. It gives an account of their feelings, their concerns, but also their hopes and aspirations.

The study was conducted through a genuinely youth-inclusive and participatory approach involving young people in the early stages of the study design and later in the validation and analysis phases. It was also inclusive in the survey stage by conducting national representative surveys in all six Western Balkan countries, with diverse ethnic and socioeconomic segments of the young population.

Purpose of the study

The British Council initiated this study based on our belief that it is essential to listen to and engage with young people, particularly in difficult times. The current pandemic is unprecedented in recent history, and young people have clearly been greatly affected by it in areas of education, employment, mobility, mental health, etc.

At the heart of this study is a commitment to exploring the youth voice and choice, with a view to achieving three main aims:

1. Understanding and examining the impact of the Covid-19 on young people's lives, with a focus on livelihoods and employment, education, health and mental health, social relations, trust in media and government, and their future outlook.
2. Amplifying youth voices by putting their views and ideas in the centre.
3. Supporting better youth policymaking during the pandemic and in the post-pandemic period.

Covering the whole Western Balkan region, we aimed to develop a comparative approach that would show similarities among youth in the region. Moreover, we hope that the differences and disparities shown in the report will help governments, donors, and NGOs have a more nuanced and tailored approach to the young population, responding effectively to the needs of different subgroups in the post-pandemic period.

Methodology

Our approach was iterative and multimethod, with the research taking place over three key phases:

First phase: Participatory approach to study design

From the very beginning of this study, our idea was to make this research led by youth and for youth. With this in mind, we initiated an online call titled “Share your Covid story” and invited young people aged 18-29 to share video or written submissions by answering the following questions: 1) How has Covid-19 impacted your life? ; 2) How is Covid-19 going to shape your future? ; and 3) How do you see the world after Covid-19?. In total, 455 people responded to the call, out of which 248 answers were eligible. Among the respondents, 71 per cent were female and 29 per cent were male. The youngest respondent was 18 years old and the oldest was 29 years old. The distribution of respondents per country was as follows: Albania (35), BiH (16), Kosovo (25), Montenegro (98), North Macedonia (23), and Serbia (51). Respondents came from 76 different municipalities across the Western Balkans.

Upon submission, a group of researchers carried out an analysis of the qualitative data using grounded theory to identify the main topics of concern for young people. During this stage, we identified 15 young people per country among the respondents (in total 90), with the aim of working with them to design the survey questionnaire. In this regard, during November 2020, the topics of concern for young people identified by the qualitative analysis were discussed in gender-balanced focus groups with selected participants. Two focus groups in each country were conducted by three facilitators (12 focus groups in total). As a result of the great enthusiasm

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and devotion of selected participants, a survey questionnaire was designed.

Second phase: Quantitative survey

As a result of Phase 1, the recruited survey agency Deep Dive reviewed the designed survey questionnaire to ensure its accuracy and appropriateness to the specific national contexts of each Western Balkan country. Nationally representative surveys of young people aged 18-29 were conducted in all six Western Balkan countries. The sample collected across the Western Balkan countries was 7,271 persons, with approximately 1,200 interviews each in Albania, BiH, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, with a margin of error $\pm 3,1$ per cent confidence interval level of 95 per cent (Table 1).

Table 1: Achieved sample across the six Western Balkan countries

Albania	1172
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1295
Kosovo	1261
Montenegro	1156
North Macedonia	1155
Serbia	1232
Total sample	7271

The survey represents the views of a diverse range of respondents, gender balanced, living across different geographies (urban and rural) and with varying levels of education and income. The methodology used for the collection of data was in-person Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI), whereby the interviewer used an electronic device to record the responses. Data collection took place between January 8 and February 15, 2021. Having in mind that data collection took place during the pandemic, special attention was given to the survey participants, in line with the national public health guidelines and the British Council best practices.

The sample was created using a standard 3-stage stratified sample (geographical region/settlement type/household). Households were selected by the random route technique starting from the given address and identifying household members aged 18 to 29 years old. In the case of two or more qualified respondents per household, the 'next birthday method' was applied.

One of the main aims of the research project was to understand the challenges experienced by young people who are particularly vulnerable and most at risk: to these ends, the study emphasizes harder-to-reach segments of the population. Where necessary, sample boosts were made to include these groups.

Hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups included in this survey were as follows:

- largest national minorities in each of the countries (up to the sample of a minimum of 100 respondents per ethnic group in each country)
- young people studying abroad (up to the sample of a minimum of 30 respondents in each country)
- young people with disabilities (up to the sample of a minimum of 30 respondents in each country)
- NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). Since this group is large enough in all countries, there was no need for additional interviews in any of the countries.

Third Phase: Qualitative analysis

The study adopted two qualitative approaches during this phase: focus group discussions with young people selected by the local partner Deep Dive and qualitative follow-ups with young people who participated in the survey design back in October 2020. These approaches allowed the study to have rigorous insight, verify and contextualize the findings from the quantitative phase, and gain a more in-depth understanding of the lives of youth during the pandemic. Both focus groups and qualitative follow-ups were conducted online due to the Covid-19 pandemic and moderated by highly trained moderators with skills in discussing sensitive topics with young people and facilitating group discussions, including in online environments.

Focus groups delivered by Deep Dive were conducted during March 2021. Local partners recruited six young people per country to participate in focus groups that lasted two hours. In total, six focus groups were organized with a total of 36 participants. To obtain insights into different segments of the youth population, the composition of focus groups varied across the countries. In BiH and Albania focus groups' participants were students of the final year of secondary education (high school or vocational school) between the ages of 18 and 20. In Montenegro, Kosovo and North Macedonia, participants of focus groups were between the ages of 18 and 29, and they were all unemployed but looking for a job. Three participants lost their jobs during the pandemic, while the other three lost their jobs before the pandemic. Finally, in the Serbia focus group, participants were between the ages of 23-29 and were students expecting to graduate soon (BA or MA).

Qualitative follow-ups were organized during the first half of March. In total, four focus groups were conducted, each lasting one hour, with a combined total of 24 participants who took part in the survey design.

The background is a solid dark blue. In the top left corner, there is a small white circle and a thick blue curved line. In the bottom left corner, there is a large white circle, a thick blue curved line, and a thin white curved line. The text 'Screenagers' is in white, and 'MONTENEGRO' is in large, bold, white capital letters.

Screenagers

MONTENEGRO

To whom we spoke



Main Sample:
1000

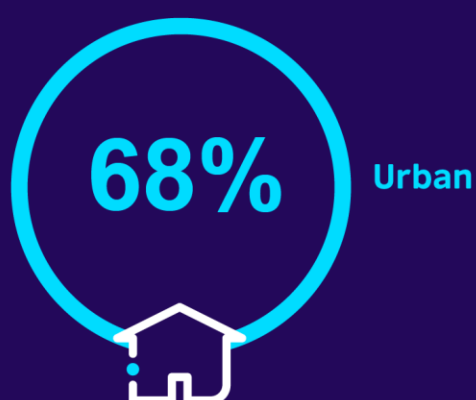
Gender



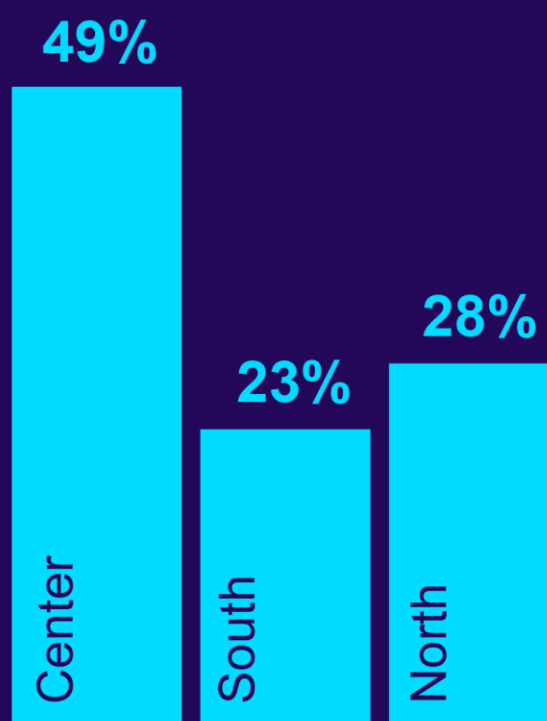
Age



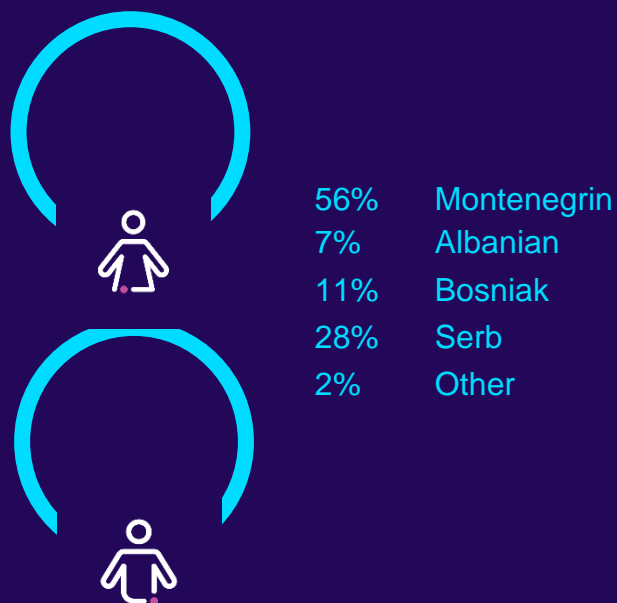
Settlement type



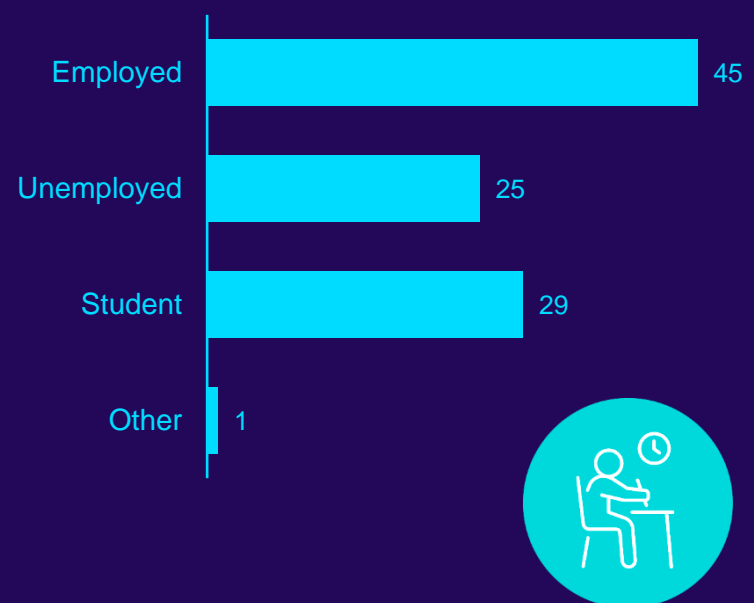
Region



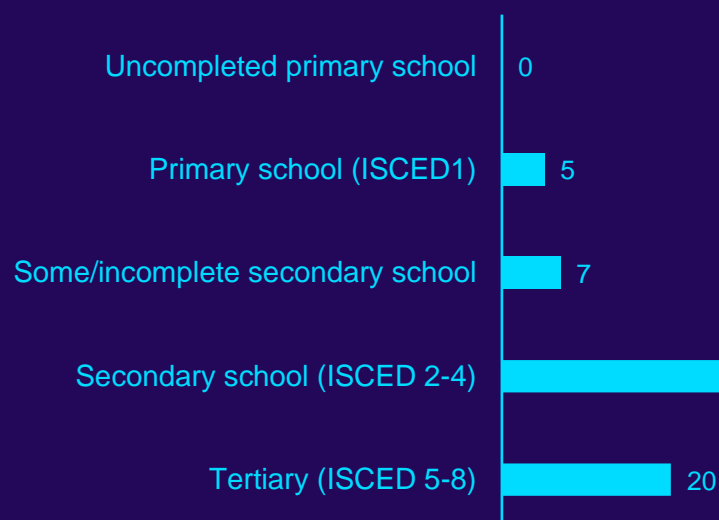
Ethnicity



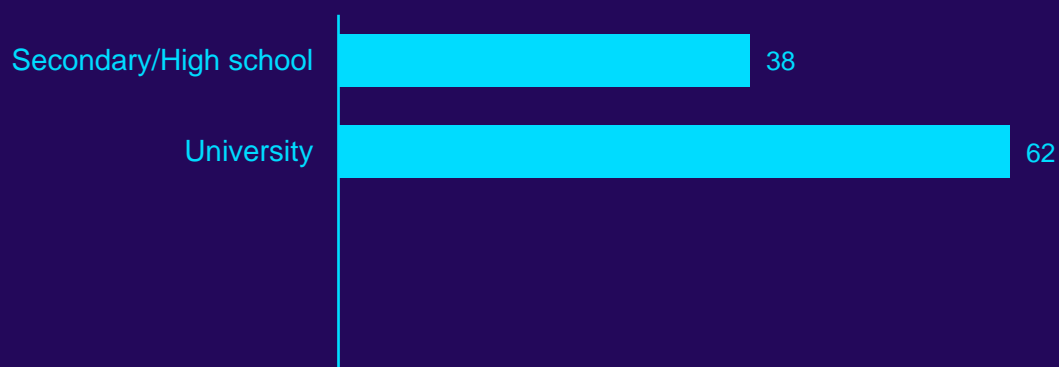
Activity status (%)



Highest completed education (%)



Student status (n=347), %

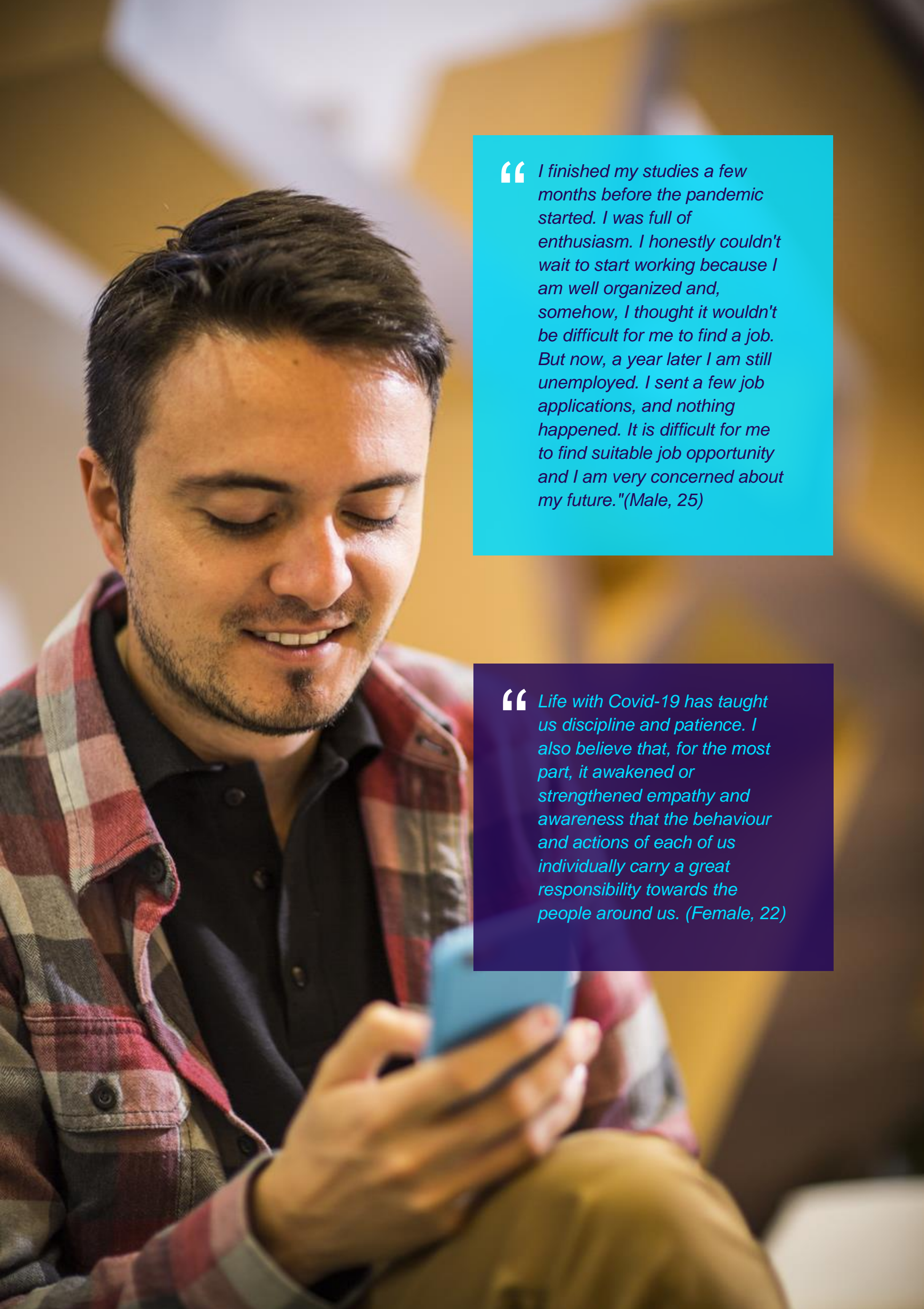


Boost Sample

Roma	98
Albanians	31
Serbs	3
Youth study abroad	18
Youth with disabilities	19
NEETS	66



Total Sample:
1156



“ I finished my studies a few months before the pandemic started. I was full of enthusiasm. I honestly couldn't wait to start working because I am well organized and, somehow, I thought it wouldn't be difficult for me to find a job. But now, a year later I am still unemployed. I sent a few job applications, and nothing happened. It is difficult for me to find suitable job opportunity and I am very concerned about my future.”(Male, 25)

“ Life with Covid-19 has taught us discipline and patience. I also believe that, for the most part, it awakened or strengthened empathy and awareness that the behaviour and actions of each of us individually carry a great responsibility towards the people around us. (Female, 22)

YOUTH LIVELIHOODS AND EMPLOYMENT DURING THE PANDEMIC

“ In a country that has experienced an economic shrink of 15 per cent due to the collapse of tourism in 2020, the already fragile economic standing of youth became even less favourable: roughly one in two respondents with previous work experience reported becoming jobless due to and/or during the pandemic; over 50 per cent of youth faced either income decline or inability to afford at least one of basic goods and services; and one in three employed young people reported either significant or moderate pay cuts. The financial hardships caused by the pandemic unevenly hit vulnerable segments of the youth population, such as Roma, NEET, and youth with disabilities.

Backdrop

Montenegro is a country whose tourism revenue generates approximately one quarter of its GDP, so it is no surprise that the Covid-19 pandemic hit Montenegro's economy the hardest among the Western Balkan six countries. Moreover, the collapse of the tourist season has led to a decline of over 15 per cent in GDP, causing the country to experience one of the deepest recessions in Europe.¹ The chronically high trade deficit reached 35 per cent of GDP in 2020, which is the highest since 2008.

The government provided four rounds of emergency economic measures from March 2020 to January 2021, including wage subsidies and one-time assistance to all unemployed persons registered with the Public Employment Service who did not receive other government aid. This was done to avoid further poverty increases and larger layoffs.² Despite the government's support measures, employment fell to a 9-year low, with losses primarily felt in tourism, construction, transport, manufacturing, and trade sectors. Lockdown and containment measures particularly affected poorer and low-skilled people, who are more likely to depend on seasonal and informal employment.

Prior to Covid-19, the youth labor market in Montenegro was already marked by high levels of youth unemployment and a high share of temporary jobs, which all together put young people in a vulnerable employment situation.³ Namely, the youth unemployment rate (age 15 to 29) was 7 per cent higher than the working age population (aged 15 to 64), 22.8 per cent vs 15.4 per cent.⁴ Furthermore, young people aged 18-24 were the most exposed to the risk of poverty (30.5 per cent), immediately after minors.⁵

¹ World Bank (2021). [Western Balkans Regular Economic Report No.19: Subdued Recovery](#).

² Ibid.

³ Regional Cooperation Council (2021). [Study on youth employment in Montenegro](#).

⁴ Eurostat. [Youth unemployment rate by sex, age and country of birth](#).

⁵ Monstat (2019). [Anketa o dohotku i uslovima života \(EU-SILC\)](#).

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The initially bad situation was only aggravated by the pandemic, severely weakening the economic outlook for the youth and resulting in a sharp rise of unemployment in the 15-29 age group from 22.8 percent in 2019 to 30.6 percent in 2020.⁶ This is almost twice as high as the unemployment rate of the working-age population, which is 18.3 percent.⁷

Findings

As a result of the pandemic, over 50 per cent of youth faced either income decline or inability to afford at least one basic good and service or both of these economic hardships. One in three young people (33 per cent) declared income decline during Covid-19, while income increased for only 4 per cent of them. On the other hand, 58 per cent said their income remained the same as prior to the pandemic (**Figure 1a**). In addition, 37 per cent of respondents reported that they were struggling to make ends meet, which is evidenced in their inability to pay for at least one basic good and service.⁸ (**Figure 1b**). Income decline and difficulty making ends meet were more likely to hit unemployed young people, those with a lower level of education, and those living in urban areas. In terms of ethnic differences, young people belonging to the Serbian national minority were more likely to experience income decreases, while their peers belonging to the Montenegrin ethnic majority were more likely to struggle to buy essential food and hygiene and pay for medicines and healthcare.

These economic hardships are well summarized by one of the focus group participants: *“My town usually lives from tourists and from what we earn during the summer season. Young people are forced to cut their budgets because they could not work during the last summer. For some youth, this means giving up on some luxury stuff, but for others, it means struggling to pay for food, rent, and essential bills.”* (Female, 24)

Figure 1a: Personal income during Covid-19
How would you describe your personal income during Covid 19 pandemic? Unit: %

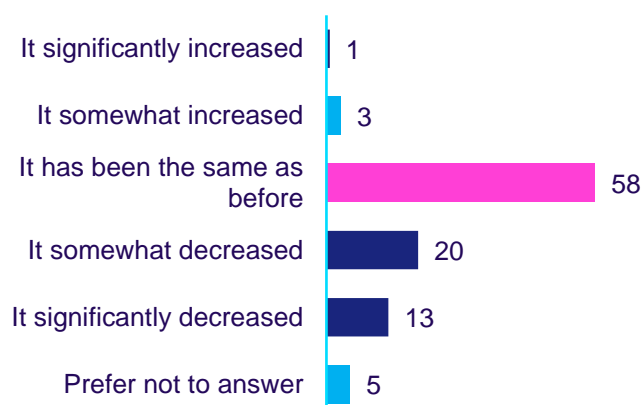
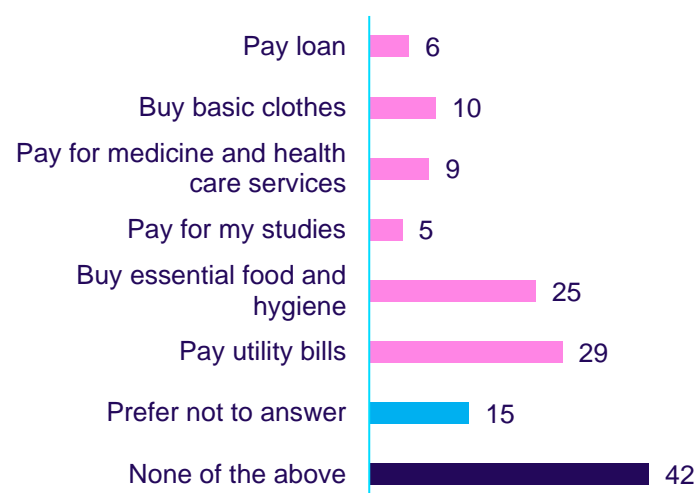


Figure 1b: Financial consequences of Covid-19
As a result of Covid-19 pandemic, I and my family struggle to? Unit: %



The economic standing of the already poverty-stricken segments of the youth population was even more affected by the pandemic. Roma and NEET youth reported income decreases more often than the main sample (57 and 40 per cent, respectively). Two-thirds of Roma struggled paying for one or more basic needs (66 per cent). Almost half of them stated they struggled paying utility bills and afford basic food and hygiene (48 per cent), while one in four reported issues in covering the costs of medicines and healthcare services (24 per cent). In regard to NEET youth, 49 per cent struggled making ends meet and for them it was most difficult to cover utility bills, buy essential food and hygiene, and basic clothes (39, 36, and 19 per cent, respectively). For youth with disabilities, two-thirds of them (66 per cent) faced hardship to afford basic goods and services, particularly when buying essential food and

⁶ Eurostat. [Youth unemployment rate by sex, age and country of birth](#), accessed on 17 June 2021.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Survey questions about basic goods and services are the following: ability to pay utility bills, buy essential food and hygiene, pay for tuition, pay for medicine and healthcare services, buy basic clothes.

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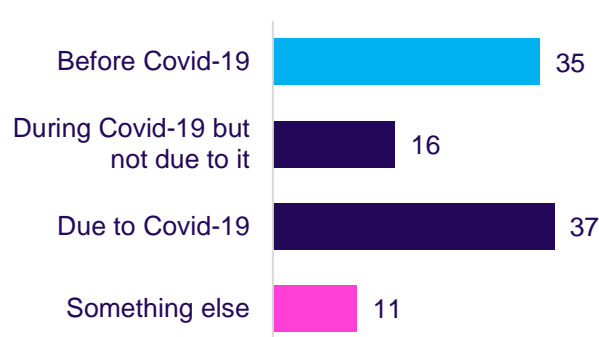
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Montenegro

hygiene (50 per cent) and paying for medicines and healthcare services (31 per cent).

The survey data reveal that Covid-19 related job losses and pay cuts were unevenly distributed across ethnic lines and geographic regions. The pandemic triggered job loss among the youth, as one in two respondents with previous work experience reported job loss due to or during the pandemic (37 and 16 per cent, respectively, **Figure 2**). Those make up 22 per cent of total number of unemployed respondents⁹, while the remainder are unemployed respondents with no previous work experience (62 per cent) or those who lost their jobs before the pandemic (13 per cent). The experience of job loss was coupled with prior salary reductions for some young people, as explained by one of the focus group participants: *“Due to reduced business activities of the company, I first got a pay cut, and two months later I got fired.”* (Male, 23)

Figure 2: Job loss during and due to Covid-19

You lost your job due to/during a Covid 19 pandemic or before a pandemic? Base: n=93; Unit: %



Job loss did not seem to be linked to gender, educational attainment, or settlement type. However, figures suggest that job loss was felt differently across ethnic lines, with young people belonging to the Serbian minority being most likely to become jobless as a direct consequence of the pandemic, compared to their peers from other ethnic groups. Furthermore, job loss was unevenly spread across the country, with unemployed youth in the central region hit the hardest by job loss due to and during the pandemic (60 per cent), compared to their compatriots in the southern and northern regions (47 and 44 per cent, respectively).

Regional disparities in job losses due to the pandemic could be explained by inequalities in activity rates between the regions. Namely, the activity rate in the central region is the highest (60.4 per cent), while in the southern region it is 54 per cent and in the northern region it is 50.6 per cent.¹⁰ The lower activity rates for both the south and north are

the result of seasonal employment: in the south, it is due to the domination of tourism and related activities, while in the north, it is due to the domination of agriculture, which is also of seasonal nature. This implies that youth in the central region were more employed before the pandemic and subsequently had more jobs to lose compared to their compatriots in other regions. This is further supported by the survey employment data, which suggest that only 21 per cent of unemployed youth in the North region had previous work experience, compared to 47 per cent in the central part of the country.

While for a large majority of respondents (61 per cent) wages remained the same as before, one third of employed young people reported significant or moderate pay cuts (9 and 23 per cent respectively). Only 6 per cent reported a pay rise. Those with lower educational degrees were more affected by pay cuts than higher educated youth. Further examination of survey data shows that there is a strong correlation between the type of employment and pay cuts, with seasonal workers being most likely to be exposed to pay cuts. This is expected since the pandemic has severely impacted tourism and businesses that heavily depend on it: construction, accommodation, and food, which all involve a significant share of seasonal work. To put things in a perspective, the number of tourists in 2020 was 83.2 per cent lower than that in 2019, while the number of overnight stays decreased by 82.1.¹¹ Consequently, seasonal workers were largely affected.

Lack of job opportunities was the likeliest cause that prevented young people in Montenegro from actively searching for employment. Approximately one in three unemployed young people submitted no job applications in the period of the six months prior to the survey, while the rest managed to apply for a job at least once.¹² Long-term unemployed individuals who did not submit a single application (37 per cent) make up over half of the total number of unemployed individuals who did not apply for a job (54 per cent). Young females were less likely to seek jobs than their male peers (42 vs 24 percent, respectively), and the same was observed among rural youth compared to urban youth (41 vs 25 per cent, respectively). Comparing the regions, the highest proportion of youth who had not applied for jobs was recorded in the southern and northern

⁹ Total number of unemployed respondents is 245 (24.5 per cent).

¹⁰ Ardarenko, M. & Mirkovic, M. (2020). [Analiza lokalnih trzista rada u Crnoj Gori](#).

¹¹ Monstat (2021). [Press release. Istraživanje o dolascima i noćenjima turista, ukupno 2020. godina](#).

¹² 1 to 3 times: 29 per cent; 4 to 10 times: 11 per cent; more than 10 times: 6 per cent.

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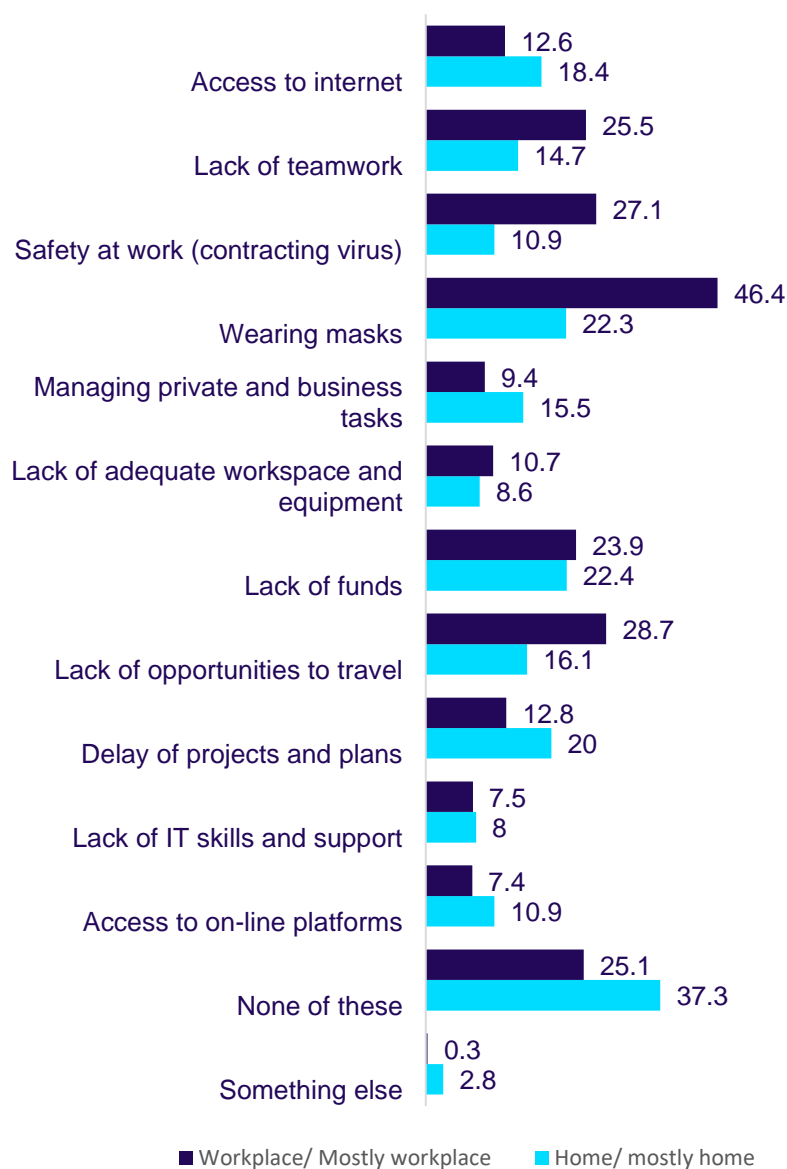
regions (41 and 40 per cent, respectively, while this figure was the lowest in the central region (25 per cent). This observed passive job seeking behaviour among unemployed youth in Montenegro, apart from their inactiveness, might be attributed to the reduced labour market demand, as evidenced by the Employment Agency of Montenegro, which registered 29.73 per cent fewer vacancies in 2020 than in 2019 (22,731 vacancies in 2020 compared to 32,350 vacancies in 2019).¹³

A small share of young people worked remotely, but there was a significant difference in the perception of work-related challenges between them and their counterparts, who mostly went to the workplace. Nearly one in ten employed young people went to the workplace all or most of the time (70 and 18 per cent, respectively). Only 5 per cent of employed youth worked remotely all the time, while another 3 per cent mostly worked remotely and occasionally went to the workplace. The analysis of data according to gender, educational attainment, and living area does not show any significant differences in the working practices during the pandemic (workplace vs. homebased).

However, work-related challenges are perceived differently by these two groups. Wearing masks and safety at work were a greater concern for those going to the workplace than for those working from home (**Figure 3**). Surprisingly, lack of teamwork and travel opportunities were more often reported by those who went to the workplace than by those who worked remotely. The former perceived greater challenges related to access to the internet and online platforms, work-life balance, and delay of projects and plans. Moreover, those who worked remotely listed the following positive aspects: saving commuting time, flexible working hours, and decreased risk of contracting the virus (49, 30, and 29 per cent, respectively). The positive sides of home-based work were stressed by focus group participants too; one of them said, *“Home-based working provided me with extra time to do a lot of things that I could not do owing to the fast-paced lifestyle before the pandemic. It enabled me to devote more time to my personal development; I practiced meditation and read a lot of books. Also, I have been less tired and have felt less under stress since I switched to working remotely.”* (Female, 24)

Figure 3: Work-related challenges

Have you faced any of the following work-related challenges during Covid-19 pandemic? Base: employed, n=454. Unit: %



¹³ Employment Agency of Montenegro.2021. [Analiza ponude, tražnje i zapošljavanja na tržištu rada u Crnoj Gori u 2020..](#)

IMPACTS ON EDUCATION

“ The large-scale disruption to education caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the shift to online learning resulted in learning loss and alienation from peers and school, as reported by the majority of students. The pandemic harmed female students more than male students, as they reported learning loss considerably more than their male counterparts. It further brought to the surface the digital divide in the country, as one in three students had limited access to the internet and online learning platforms. These students were more likely to state that they learned less during the pandemic than students who had no such issues.

Backdrop

The pandemic disrupted the education of 35 per cent of respondents in our survey, who are still in education, out of which 38 per cent are still in secondary schools and 62 per cent are in tertiary education. In response to the coronavirus outbreak, both groups of students switched to full online work. For secondary school students, classes have been broadcast continuously since the beginning of the pandemic until the end of the school year, while for university students, classes have been delivered remotely through different online learning platforms (Zoom, Teams, etc.). In the new school/academic year, classes have been delivered partly in school and partly online, depending on the current epidemiological situation, measures and the capacities of schools/universities. Additionally, it should be noted that students residing on campuses in Podgorica, Niksic, Kotor, and Cetinje were required to move out of dormitories, which caused another disruption to their student life.¹⁴

While remote learning was promptly introduced, it should be stressed that the majority of teaching staff and students have had little experience in online teaching and the use of e-learning platforms.

Findings

Although they spent more time studying during the pandemic, students reported learning loss, with females reporting this more frequently than males. Nearly half of students in Montenegro (48 per cent) think they learned less than they would have in regular circumstances (**Figure 4**). This opinion was more widely held by female than male students (53 vs 42 per cent). Students reported a loss of knowledge, although they spent more time studying: nearly two-thirds of them (59 per cent) thought they spent far more or somewhat more time studying compared to the time before the pandemic; time spent studying decreased for 12 per cent of students, while for others it remained the same (29 per cent).

Limited access to the internet and online learning platforms adversely affected students' learning. Nearly one in three students in Montenegro reported

¹⁴ Nikolic, D. (2020). [Digital education at the University of Montenegro during the COVID-19 pandemic.](#)

Covid Screenagers

Socially distant, Digitally close
Montenegro

issues with access to the internet and online learning platforms (31 per cent). These issues were more frequently reported by high school students and students from urban areas than by their peers in rural areas and university students. Young people who reported issues with internet and online learning platform access were more likely to state they learned less during the pandemic than students who had no such issues.

Other challenges associated with the pandemic-imposed changes to education include participation in classes and exams/schoolwork/homework. While most students felt distant from their teachers (60 per cent), their views on participation and involvement in classes under new conditions were more ambivalent. A similar share of youth evaluated their participation and involvement in classes as the same or reduced compared to the period before the pandemic (38 and 34 per cent), while others thought it increased. Female students and urban youth tend to report less involvement and participation in classes more commonly than their male counterparts. In regard to problems with exams/homework, almost three in four students reported more of these problems (71 per cent), with problems being more acute for secondary school students than for university students. These challenges were further reiterated by our focus group participants, as one of them testified: *“I have really struggled with online learning at university. I felt like it significantly reduced my participation in lectures and that we did not have time to ask clarification questions. I missed an opportunity to debate with other students during lectures as we did before the pandemic [...] As a result, I passed fewer exams compared to the previous year.”* (Female, 23)

In addition to the impact on learning, the switch to online education also had an adverse impact on the social dimension of education. One in two students felt less close to other students and felt less as a part of their school/faculty due to the changes brought on by the pandemic (51 and 53 per cent, respectively). These sentiments are more pronounced among students living in rural rather than in urban areas and are slightly more commonly expressed by university rather than secondary school students. This sentiment of distance to fellow students and disassociation from the school/faculty, make them feel neutral in terms of enthusiasm for their studies compared to time before the pandemic. Namely, 39 per cent of students feel happy to study to the same extent as before, while 27 per cent does not share this feeling; the rest are neutral.

Cross-functional sets of skills, especially social and emotional skills, are required by students to equip them to move forward. Students tend to perceive that the pandemic will have an adverse effect on their knowledge and skills over the next three years (see Future Outlook). To fully seize their potential and flourish in the increasingly unstable

post-Covid-19 work environment, they think they will need a different mix of skills. One in two students (50 per cent) believe that the top skills they will need in the future are social and emotional skills that will ensure effective collaboration, management, and self-expression (**Figure 5**). These are followed by critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and innovation (47 per cent). They also highly rank the ability to keep pace in a fully digital environment (43 per cent), and adaptability and resilience to thrive during Covid-19 aftershocks and beyond (34 per cent). Focus groups expressed a somewhat different opinion about the skillset needed for the future, since participants unanimously prioritized IT skills over the other skills.

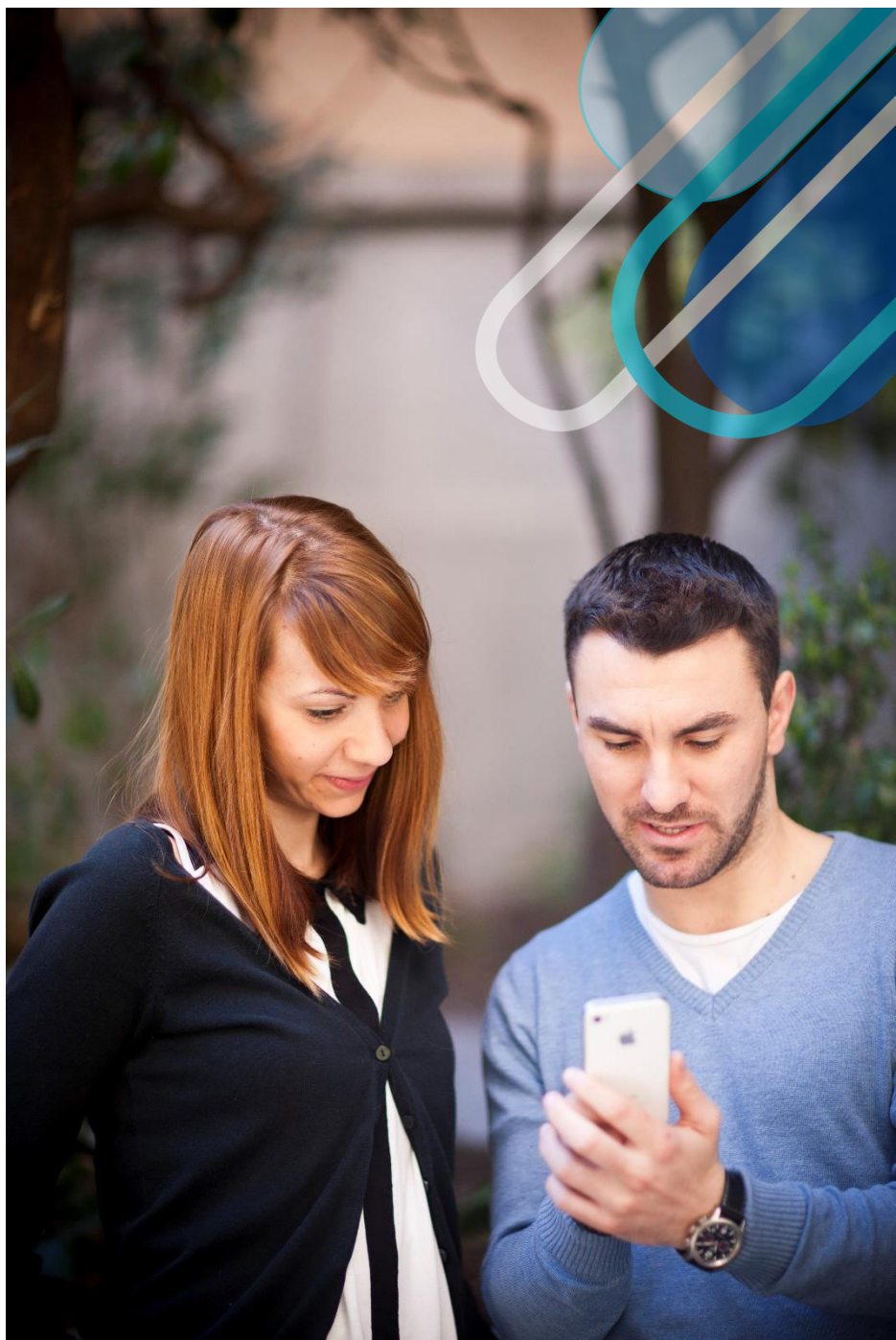


Figure 4: Education and Covid-19

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Base: respondents who are currently in school/university; n=347; Unit: %

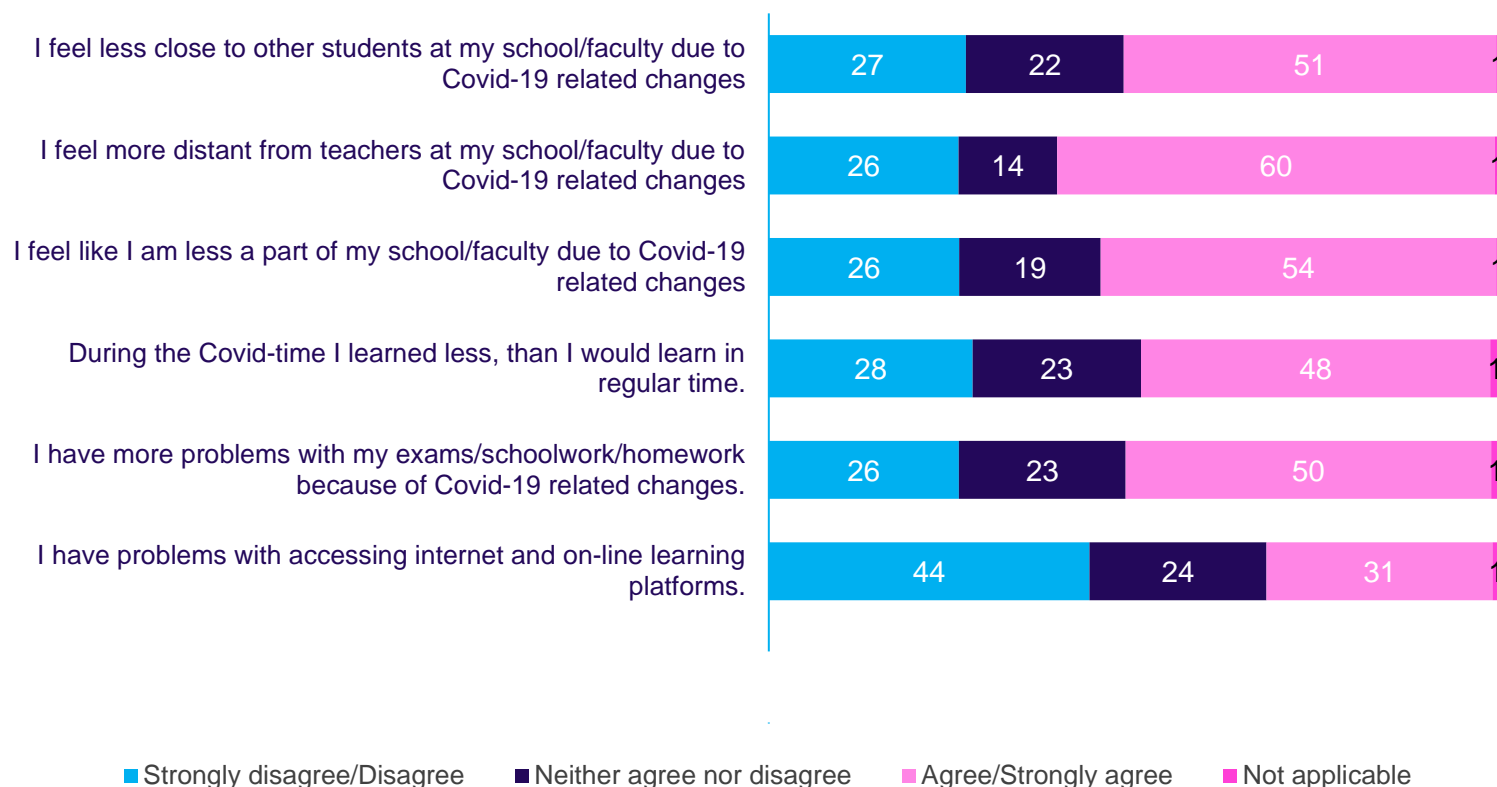
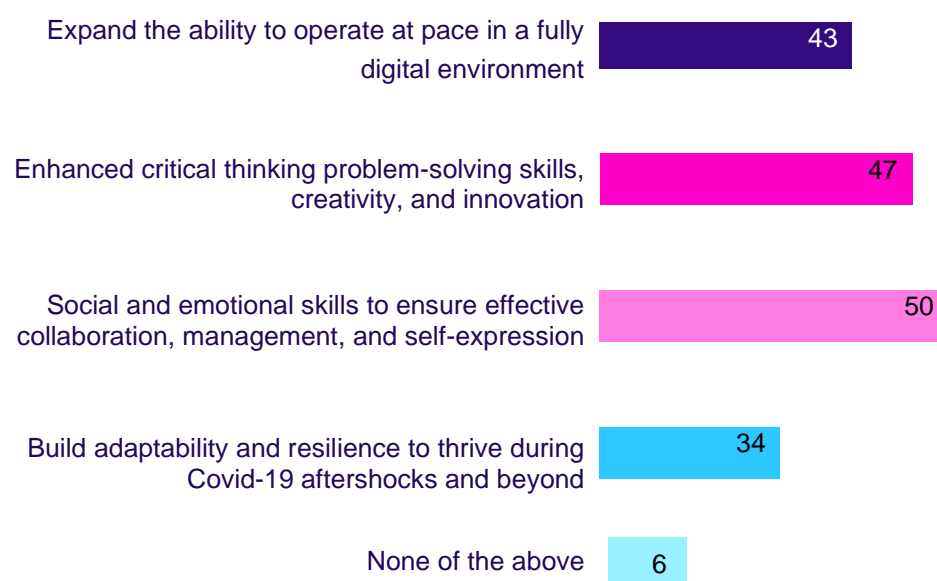


Figure 5: Future skills

What skills will you need the most to thrive in post Covid-19 world. Please select top 2 priorities. Base: respondents who are in school/university at the moment; n=347. Unit: %



“*I lost the motivation to study. This year was really bad in terms of education. I did not do well in distance learning, it was too fast, superficial and a bit confusing to me. This negatively reflected on my marks. I feel disappointed about that.” (Male, 18)*

“*A lot of older people in my community think of us (young people) as reckless people who only want to party and do not follow public health measures. I think this is unfair, because they put all of us in the same basket, and that’s not true. Those people talk like they were never young and never had the same needs. They should understand us better.” (Female, 22)*



“*I spent a lot of time with my family, and I got to know them better now. I realized what little time I used to spend with them in the past few years. I feel closer to them now. Also, I spent a lot of time online with my friends. I think we started to take care of each other’s mental health. We really supported each other, like we have never done before. This means a lot to me.” (Female, 23)*

“*There are talks about recession and the pandemic's impact on jobs. These make me feel anxious. I am about to graduate from university and start my carrier. I think it is not good time to be on the employment market now. I am thinking now to prolong my education and pursue MA degree. This will release some pressure of me.” (Male, 24)*

YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS ABOUT ON IMPACTS ON BEHAVIOURS AND MENTAL WELL-BEING

“The pandemic was a “perfect storm” to give rise to mental health challenges, as many young people in Montenegro lost quite a bit, especially in regard to education, employment and social life. They adjusted their daily routines significantly, as they reported increased time spent on the internet, with family, watching movies, and on personal development and decreased time spent with friends. Levels of worry and annoyance in young people have been more negatively impacted by the pandemic than levels of loneliness, tiredness, and hopelessness. Despite reported challenges to mental well-being, young people were hesitant to ask for professional support and mainly relied on self-coping mechanisms, including support from family and friends.

Backdrop

Previous studies have shown that young people in Montenegro spend their leisure time predominantly engaged in passive activities such as rest, relaxation, and time with family and friends. Nearly 70 per cent of respondents said they spend most of the time listening to music every day.¹⁵ According to this, the pandemic does not seem to pose a significant challenge to their daily routines. However, young people have experienced a comprehensive range of pandemic-related disruptions, such as closing schools/universities, transitioning to remote education and work, and loss of income or employment, which could undermine their mental wellbeing. There are no specific data on the pandemic's impact on young people's mental health in Montenegro. However, according to the Clinic for Psychiatry of the Clinical Centre of Montenegro, the demand for mental health support during the pandemic has increased. Its analysis of users of phone-based mental health support suggests that younger people, up to 40 years of age, made up 28.7 percent of the phone-based mental health support requests. Dominant issues reported were related to anxiety and depression, difficulties in interpersonal relationships, feelings of loneliness, and occasional panic attacks. In regard to the issues of the younger population, they were mainly related to anxiety and panic, which occurred in more than half of the callers.¹⁶

¹⁵ Friedrich Ebert Study (2019). [Youth Study Montenegro](#).

¹⁶ Aljazeera (2020). [Kako se pandemija odražava na mentalno zdravlje?](#)

Findings

The pandemic has changed the daily routine of most young people, particularly in regard to urban youth. Almost half of young people say that their daily routine has changed due to the pandemic (45 per cent). A greater share of younger than older cohorts (49 vs 39 per cent), and urban youth more than rural youth reported changes in daily routine due to Covid-19 (48 vs 40 per cent). The weakest impact of the pandemic on young people's daily routine is recorded among the Albanian and Roma minorities - 27 and 31 per cent, respectively, said that their daily routine had changed.

Compared to the time prior to the pandemic, 73 per cent of young people reported that they spent more time online (**Figure 6**). Before the pandemic, this was on average six hours per day.¹⁷ In the pre-pandemic period, young people in Montenegro used the internet mainly to communicate with friends and family, be active on social networks, and share photos, videos, and music. However, this survey found that during the Covid-19 pandemic, the internet was used not only to keep in touch with people but also to make new acquaintances. Namely, the trend of meeting new people online seems to be on the rise: 33 per cent of respondents said they meet more new people online than in person.

In addition to increased time spent on the internet, young people reported that they spent more time with the family (64 per cent), watching movies (56 per cent), and on personal development (45 per cent). As expected, traveling abroad for pleasure and spending time with friends decreased considerably (by 74 and 45 per cent, respectively). The survey suggests that the pandemic has not affected the time spent doing sports, as almost equal share of respondents reported increased and unchanged time spent on it (32 and 33 per cent, respectively), while for the remaining 27 per cent, it has decreased. Activities practiced similarly to before the pandemic are religious activities and house chores (56 and 50 per cent, respectively). However, it should be noted that time spent on house chores differs significantly between women and men: about one in two women (47 per cent) compared to one in three men report doing more house chores during the pandemic (32 per cent).

Compared to other Western Balkan countries, the impact of Covid-19 on the mental health of Montenegrin youth has been less negative: the pandemic has not made them feel lonelier and more hopeless. More than half of young people in Montenegro say that the lack of freedom of movement imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic was very hard for them (52 per cent). The younger cohort more than the older one, and members of the Serbian

minority more than other ethnic groups were more likely to find the situation difficult. When asked about specifics related to their mental well-being, young people reported feeling more worried (60 per cent) and annoyed (49 per cent) than before the pandemic (**Figure 7**). When it comes to feelings of loneliness, tiredness, and hopelessness, the majority of young people think that the pandemic has not negatively influenced these feelings, while one third of them think the opposite (ranging from 32 to 33 per cent). Furthermore, one in four young people developed sleeping problems during the pandemic.

The pandemic has had a different impact on the mental well-being of young people in Montenegro depending on age, gender, employment status, education, and living area. Those older than 24 reported feeling more worried and annoyed compared to those younger than 24. Young females more commonly reported that they felt worried, lonely, and had problems sleeping compared to their male peers. The mental wellbeing of unemployed individuals seems to be more negatively affected than that of employed individuals, as they were more likely to feel worried, annoyed, lonely, and develop sleeping problems. Higher educated young people were more likely to feel worried than those with lower educational degrees. In terms of urban/rural differences, young people living in urban areas asserted feeling more hopeless than their counterparts from rural areas.

Despite reported challenges to mental well-being, young people are hesitant to ask for professional support. To preserve their mental well-being during the pandemic, the youth deployed a wide range of self-coping mechanisms: improving one's diet (36 per cent), doing more things they enjoy such as watching movies or cooking (26 per cent), doing more exercise and sports (20 per cent), smoking cigarettes, practicing meditation and relaxation, and staying well informed (less than 20 per cent each).

Young people sought professional support when their self-coping mechanisms were not sufficient to mitigate the adverse impact of the pandemic on mental health. Nearly one in ten young adults reported using mental health services during the pandemic (8 per cent). They mostly reported using phone-based mental support services (2 per cent), faith-based services, internet-based chat and support groups (2 per cent), individual counselling with a psychologist, life coach, or psychiatrist (2 per cent), group counselling or a support program (1 per cent), and specialized youth services (1 per cent).

¹⁷ Friedrich Ebert Study (2019). [Youth Study Montenegro](#).

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Figure 6: Impact of Covid-19 on behaviours/practices

Compared with the time before Covid-19, how much time you spend in the following activities? (score '1' means far less and score '5' means far more. Unit: %

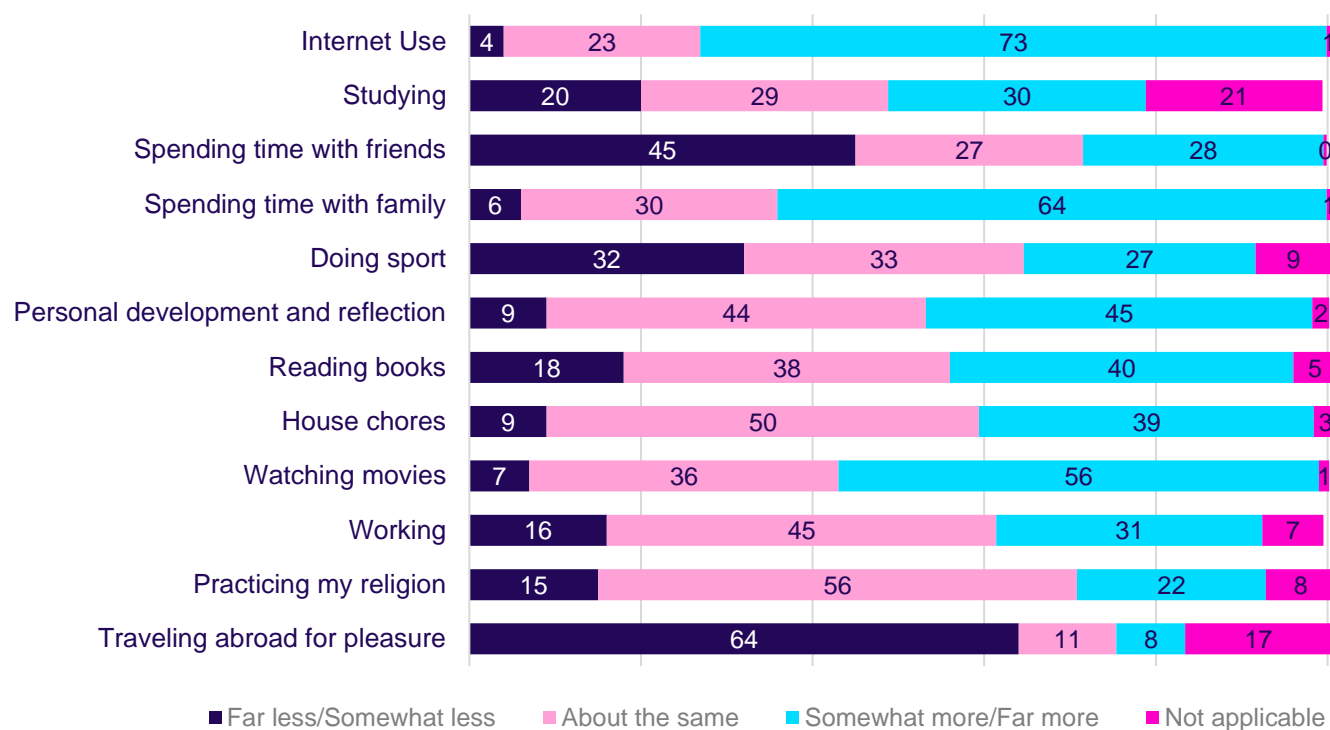
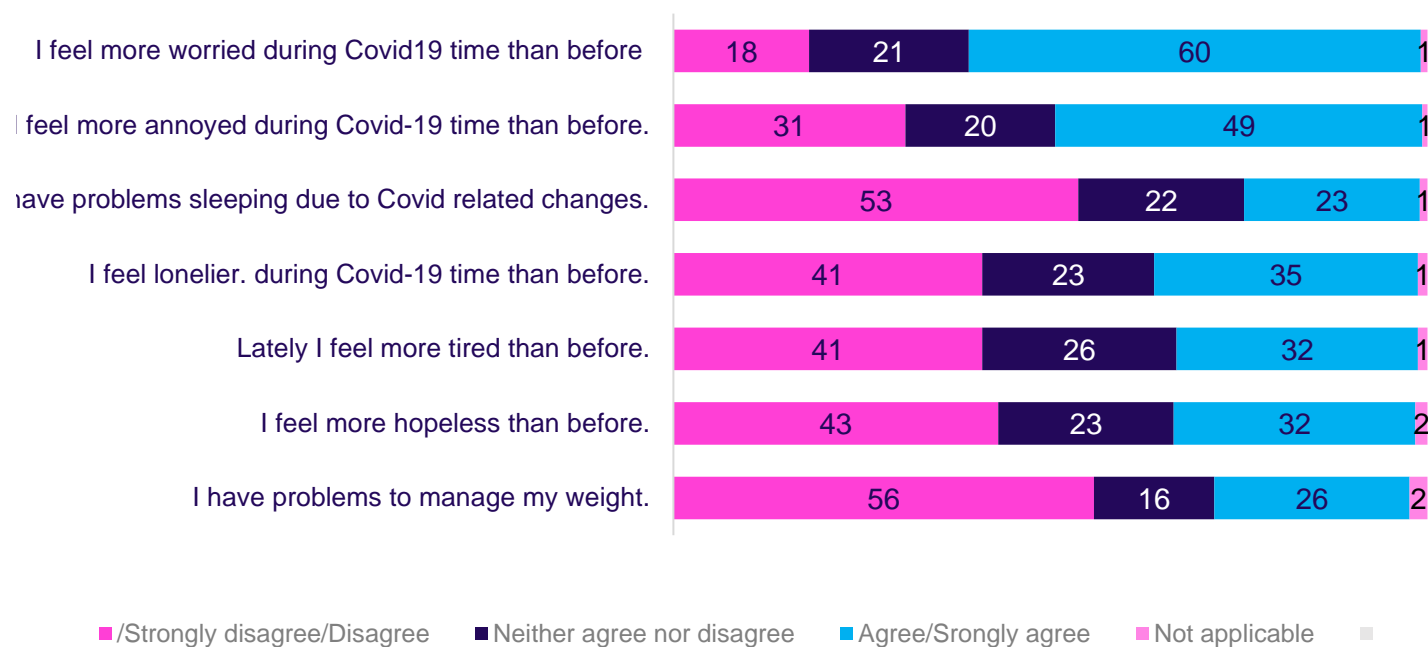


Figure 7: Impact of Covid-19 on mental wellbeing

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (score '1' means you strongly disagree and score '5' that you strongly agree with the statement) Unit: %



It is worth highlighting that youth with disabilities used mental health support services during the pandemic more often than the main sample (25 per cent), with internet-based chat and support groups being used most commonly (12 per cent).

The need for mental health support is expressed almost three times more frequently than the reported use of mental health services. A quarter of respondents felt the need for some sort of

psychological help (25 per cent). This need was expressed most by youth with disabilities. Among the types of support needed, young people listed the following ones: information about emotional or behavioural problems and available treatment/services (12 per cent), courses/counselling for life skills, self-esteem or motivation, talk therapy with a psychologist/psychiatrist (9 per cent), and medication for emotional or behavioural problems (5

per cent). Those who felt the need for support mostly did not get it because they wanted to work out the problem on their own (32 per cent), were not sure where to get help (22 per cent), had problems accessing the service that would help them (18 per cent), felt uncomfortable admitting mental issues (18 cent), or could not afford it (17 per cent).

Survey results suggest that the provision of healthcare services during the pandemic was not equally provided in all parts of the country and across all subgroups. Of those who contracted the virus (7 per cent), more than a third said they did not have timely access to testing services, whereas 12 per cent of them said they did not receive efficient and timely medical care once they were diagnosed with Covid-19 (**Figure 8a and 8b**). Nearly one in ten young people (9 per cent) said they did not have enough space to self-isolate from other members of the household. Almost twice as many young people living in urban areas had limited access to testing services compared to those in rural areas (47 vs 24 per cent). Young people living in the northern region faced more problems with limited diagnostic services and efficient medical care (47 and 19 per cent, respectively) than those living in the central region (30 and 11 per cent, respectively) and the southern region (11 and 0 per cent, respectively). In regard to ethnicity, Bosniaks reported having limited access to diagnostic services and efficient and timely medical care more than the main sample (47 and 38 per cent, respectively). Additionally, almost half of young people with a chronic illness/disability reported limited access to their regular medical care services due to the pandemic (47 per cent).

Figure 8a: Covid-19 infection rate
Have you had Covid-19? Unit: %

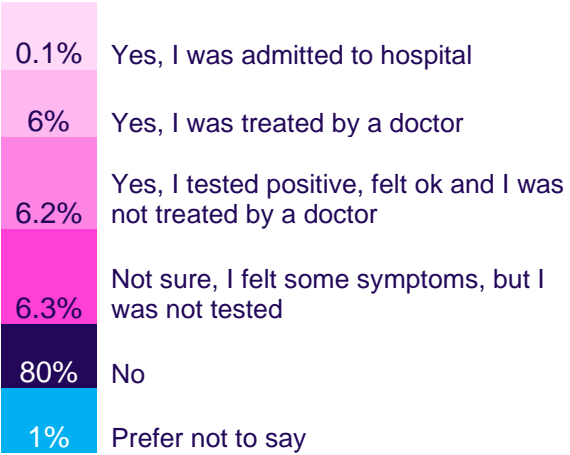
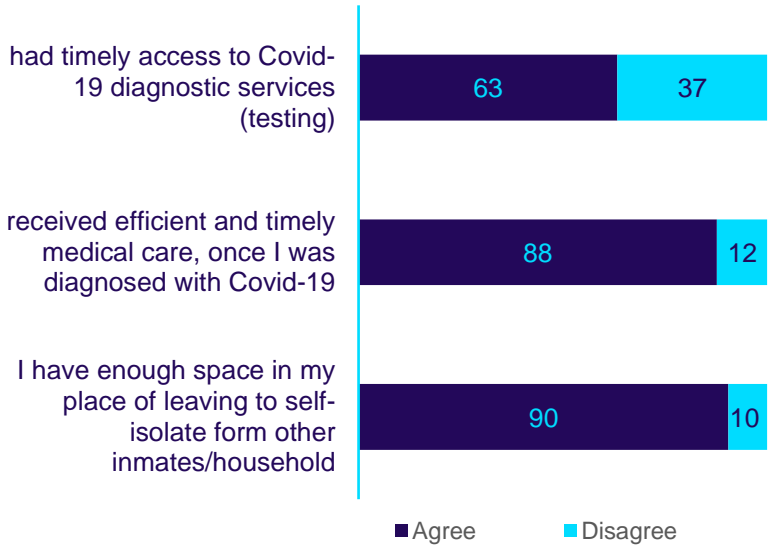


Figure 8b: and access to health care services
Please agree or disagree with the following statements? Unit: %



YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS ABOUT IMPACTS ON SOCIETY AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

“ The pandemic, coupled with ethnic and political tensions, disrupted the social fabric in Montenegro at a large scale. Despite this, the survey results suggest that it did not adversely impact young people’s relationships with their closest ones, as they reported improved relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners. However, they think the pandemic has widened pre-existing inequalities, as they believe it has increased disparities between the rich and the poor, made marginalized groups more deprived, and increased ethnic, political, and intergenerational divisions. Furthermore, most of them think that young people are blamed by society for spreading the virus. Despite the widespread sense of stigmatization, young people rarely reported being discriminated against.

Backdrop

The year 2020 will be remembered for the fierce polarization and political changes that took place in Montenegro, increasing the division along political and ethnic lines and eroding the social cohesion to an extent that was not witnessed ever since the country’s independence referendum in 2006. The year started with protests during which thousands marched against the Law on Freedom of Religion, a measure that was perceived to be targeting the Serbian Orthodox Church, an institution that enjoys a high level of trust among citizens (46.4 per cent).¹⁸ While the protests were halted during the early months of the pandemic, they continued throughout the summer and served to galvanize the electorate ahead of the August parliamentary elections, leading to the formation of the new government in November 2020. Coupled with the pandemic, the political and religious tensions had the potential to further widen existing inequalities in Montenegro and leave behind those already at a risk of exclusion. These include the poor and deprived, long-term unemployed, elderly, low-income pensioners, persons with disabilities, refugees and internally displaced persons, HIV/AIDS patients, and Roma. The interplay between the pandemic and political events during 2020 provides a more comprehensive perspective for understanding how Covid-19 contributed to increased perceptions of divisions in Montenegro.

Findings

Similar to other Western Balkan countries, young people in Montenegro think that their relationships with their closest ones improved during the pandemic. While the lockdown and social distancing measures were a trying time for young people and their relationship with family, friends, and partners, survey results indicate that they have succeeded in preserving and even improving these

¹⁸ CEDEM (2019). [Public opinion poll](#).

relationships. The pandemic has reportedly had a positive impact on young people's relationships with their families. The relationship with the family has improved for one in two youngsters in Montenegro (52 per cent), with one in five disagreeing with this statement (15 per cent) and a third saying they were neutral (31 per cent). The survey also found that those who stated that their relationship with the family improved felt less lonely during the pandemic. Regarding relationships with friends during the pandemic, they tended to be at the same level as in the pre-pandemic period: 38 per cent thought that it improved, 39 were neutral, and 21 per cent thought it did not worsen. When it comes to the relationship with the romantic partner, almost an equal portion of young people think that their relationship with their romantic partner has improved or stayed the same as before the pandemic (34 and 32 per cent, respectively), while one in five young people think it has deteriorated (20 per cent).

The overwhelming majority of young people in Montenegro think they are labelled as virus spreaders in society. Nearly two in three respondents thought that young people were stigmatized during Covid-19 as irresponsible virus spreaders (63 per cent). This belief was particularly pronounced by the youth who are employed and live in urban areas. Among those who contracted the virus (13 per cent), an overwhelming majority felt supported by friends (87 per cent), while the rest felt uncomfortable about it in society. Among those who felt uneasy about contracting the virus, some said they did not share such information with friends (4 per cent), others felt unsupported (9 per cent), judged (1 per cent), and stigmatized (2 per cent). A sense of discomfort was more widely felt by ethnic Serbs who contracted the virus than it was the case with the main sample (22 vs 13 per cent).

Discrimination is rarely reported despite the widespread sense that young people are stigmatized as irresponsible virus spreaders. Only 3 per cent of respondents felt discriminated based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, or age. The youth belonging to ethnic minorities and vulnerable groups reported being discriminated more than the main sample. One in four young Roma (25 per cent) and one in ten young Bosniaks (10 per cent) claim that they have been discriminated against during the pandemic. Another vulnerable category is young people with disabilities, 6 per cent of whom reported being discriminated against during the pandemic.

Only 1 per cent of the surveyed youth said they were victims of gender-based violence. However, the share of those who witnessed gender-based violence in their close surroundings implies that this is not so rare: nearly one in ten young people stated they had witnessed gender-based violence (8 per cent).

Further scrutiny of survey data suggests that minorities and vulnerable groups were either more exposed or more perceptive to gender-based violence. Namely, the highest rate of gender-based violence is recorded among the Bosniak minority, since as many as 8 per cent of them reported being victims of gender-based violence, while 13 per cent of them noticed it in their close surroundings. Youth with disabilities and Roma youth report witnessing gender-based violence more commonly than the main sample (20 and 10 per cent, respectively).

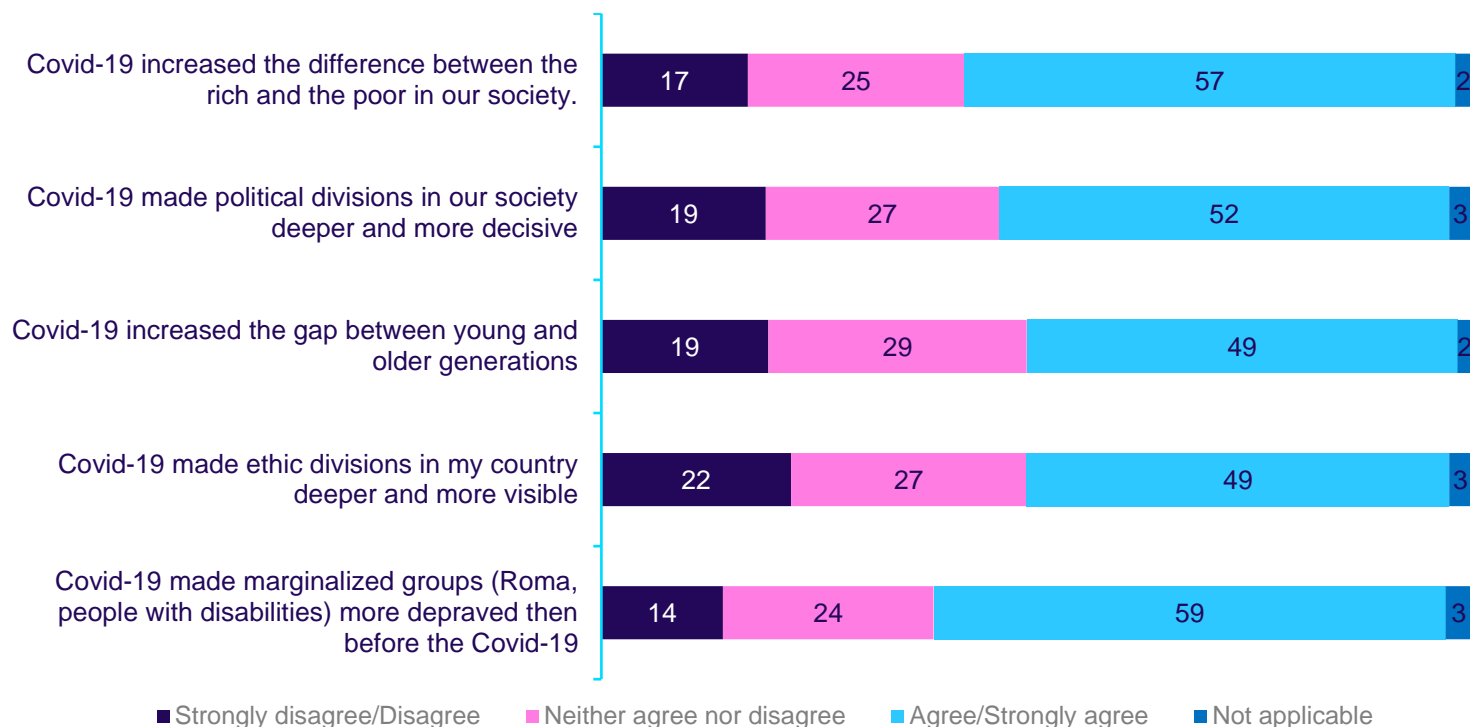
Survey results show that discrimination sometimes escalated in violence or bullying during the pandemic. One in ten young people in Montenegro reported being victims of increased violence/and/or bullying (10 per cent). Again, subgroups who reported being discriminated more than the main sample reported experiencing or witnessing violence disproportionately more than the main sample. One-third of youth with disabilities stated they had been victims or witnessed violence during the pandemic (30 per cent). Furthermore, one in four young Roma and one in six young Bosniaks stated the same.

Nearly one in five (18 per cent) young people think that discrimination towards specific groups has increased during the pandemic, with urban youth noticing it more frequently than rural youth (21 per cent vs 11 per cent). Roma youth and youth with disabilities see increased discrimination towards specific groups more than the main sample (27 per cent each). Those who think that discrimination towards a specific group has increased think that it has increased most towards the elderly (59 per cent), people with chronic diseases, and people with disabilities (55 per cent each). Strikingly, nine out of ten young people with disabilities thought that discrimination towards themselves increased during the pandemic.

About a half of young people think that the pandemic has increased economic, political, ethnic, and intergenerational divisions in the country. Over half of young people feel that the pandemic has increased disparities between the rich and the poor (56 per cent). Somewhat fewer respondents think the pandemic has made political divisions in the society even deeper and more visible (52 per cent) and increased the gap between the older and younger generations (50 per cent). Ethnic divisions are perceived as deeper and more visible by 49 per cent of young people (**Figure 9**). In addition, almost two in three young people (59 per cent) think that Covid-19 has made marginalized groups more deprived than before. Surprisingly, marginalized groups (Roma, youth with disabilities, NEET) report increased deprivation of their position due to the pandemic less frequently than the main sample: 52 per cent of Roma, 36 per cent of youth with disabilities, and 49 per cent of NEET.

Figure 9: Impact of Covid-19 on society

Thinking of the period from the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in March till present, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? n=1000; Unit: %



The perception of increased inequalities and divisions differs across ethnic and geographic lines.

Young people who belong to the Serbian minority were more likely to state that Covid-19 increased the difference between the rich and the poor, and that it made political divisions in the society deeper and more decisive. In terms of geography, the Southern and Central regions are at extreme ends when it comes to the perception of increased divisions in the society due to the pandemic. Over 60 per cent of young people living in the south think that the pandemic has widened economic, political, ethnic, and intergenerational divisions (ranging from 61 to 68 per cent). On the other hand, less than 50 per cent of young people living in the central region think that these divisions have widened (ranging from 43 to 47 per cent).

Although 52 per cent of young people think that there is more solidarity because of the pandemic, volunteering has not been widely practiced. Only 6 per cent of youth volunteered during the pandemic and among the reasons for not volunteering they listed a lack of time, lack of relevant opportunities, and lack of interest (30, 26, and 25 per cent, respectively). According to 57 per cent of respondents, volunteering options decreased during the Covid-19 pandemic (22 per cent think that there were significantly fewer volunteering options). If they were given a chance to volunteer in support of people affected by Covid-19, nearly one-fifth of them would take that chance (21 per cent); a similar percentage would not do it (18 per cent), while 61 per cent are undecided and would potentially volunteer.

The pandemic has created a sense of global belonging among youth in Montenegro.

Half of young people want to meet more people from other countries after Covid-19. These respondents belong to the younger rather than the older cohort, higher educated rather than lower educated, and unemployed rather than employed respondents. Furthermore, almost the majority of young people stated that Covid-19 positively impacted their opinion about foreigners (45 per cent), with those under 24 years of age and rural youth thinking more positively about foreigners than their older and urban peers. Last, nearly two-thirds of young people think that global issues such as Covid-19 made them feel more connected to the rest of the world (59 per cent). This perception is more present among those with higher education than among those with lower educational levels. This is how a focus group participant summarized it: *"The pandemic taught us the meaning of 'global'. We are all facing the same problem regardless of borders. This makes me feel closer to people worldwide."* (Male, 21)

TRUST IN AND PERCEPTIONS OF MEDIA COVERAGE DURING THE CRISIS

“ **Young people in Montenegro place the greatest trust in friends and family, and people with lived Covid-19 experience as a source of information about the pandemic, far more than in traditional/online media, scientists, health experts, and the government. Media coverage of the pandemic does not seem to meet the appetite for reliable reporting among young people, as almost half of them do not trust any media in relation to the pandemic news. Furthermore, they thought media reporting was unclear, confusing, dramatizing, and not fully true of the problem.**

Backdrop

While the older population (aged over 60) in Montenegro mostly watch television as their preferred source of information, younger generations (ages 18 to 29) more commonly choose online media and social networks.¹⁹ Bearing in mind that online media and social networks are also known as channels frequently used to spread disinformation and propaganda, youth can be more exposed to unprofessional reporting and content. Although media spaces were abundant with disinformation during Covid-19, key media outlets have been reported in line with public interest without creating false narratives. However, tabloids have kept channelling

disinformation while also acting as creators or producers.²⁰

As a result of disinformation campaigns, a great number of people believe in conspiracy theories (over 80 per cent), the most popular being the theory about pharmaceutical industry involvement in the spread of the coronavirus. Furthermore, the belief in conspiracy theories is consistent across age groups, which shows that young people are prone to conspiracies the same way as older cohorts.²¹

Findings

Personal social networks, and those with lived Covid-19 experience are more trustworthy sources of information than traditional media, health experts, and the government. Taking into account that information sharing has been very important during Covid-19 as people needed to learn about the disease and act accordingly, this survey explored which source of information young people trust the most. The results show that young adults have the strongest trust in their friends and family, and people with lived Covid-19 experience (88 and 76 per cent, respectively). Other sources of information are trusted far less; these include traditional media such as TV, newspapers, and radio (34 per cent), international organisations, i.e., WHO (32 per cent), scientists and health experts (30 per cent), and online media (portals and social media 27 per cent). The least trusted sources of information are politicians/governments and celebrities (21 and 6 per cent, respectively). Such views are aligned with the findings revealed in a recent youth study that outlines that most young people place the greatest trust in members of their closest family, while political leaders are at the bottom of the list.²²

¹⁹ SEENPM (2021). [Media trust in the Western Balkans: Together apart.](#)

²⁰ BIRN (2020). [Montenegro Took Wrong Route in Tackling Pandemic Disinformation.](#)

²¹ BiEPAG (2020). [The Suspicious Virus: Conspiracies and COVID19 in the Balkans.](#)

²² Friedrich Ebert Study (2019). [Youth Study Montenegro.](#)

Covid Screenagers

Socially distant, Digitally close

Montenegro

For Covid-19-related news, most young people in Montenegro do not trust any media (45 per cent) or trust some media in the country (50 per cent). Being male, having lower education, and living in urban areas were mostly associated with distrust in the media related to Covid-19. In terms of regional differences, the highest distrust in the media is recorded among the youth in the south (60 per cent), compared to the youth in the centre and north (38 and 44 per cent, respectively). When it comes to information on Covid-19, young people have the most trust in radio or TV programs (32 per cent), web-based or printed newspapers (28 per cent), and social media (4 per cent). At the same time, these are also the least trustworthy media: TV programs (23 per cent), web-based or printed newspapers (20 per cent), and social media (16 per cent, **Figure 10**).

Based on this, the radio and TV programmes scored the highest positive net rate (9 per cent), followed by web-based or printed newspapers (8 per cent).

Young people are not satisfied with the way the media have reported on the pandemic. Young people think that media was filled with so much information that it became unclear and confusing (63 per cent); the media did not report on the true extent of the problem (64 per cent) and that the media made things seem more dramatic and caused more panic (66 per cent). However, in regard to assessing whether the media reported in a manner that is understandable to youth, our respondents tend to think they do (47 per cent, **Figure 11**).

Figure 10: Trust in media

What media sources do you trust the most/least to be well informed on Covid-19 matters? Unit: %

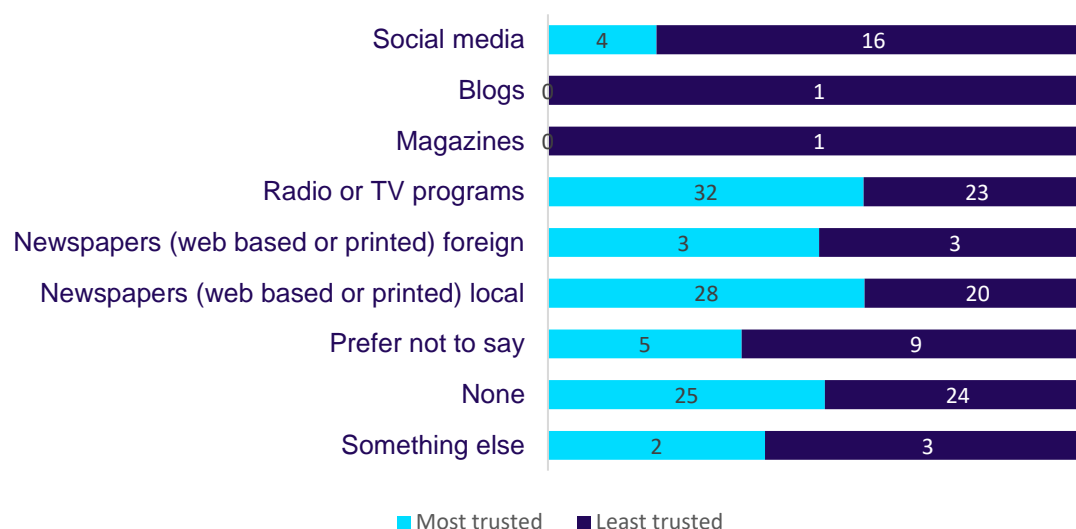
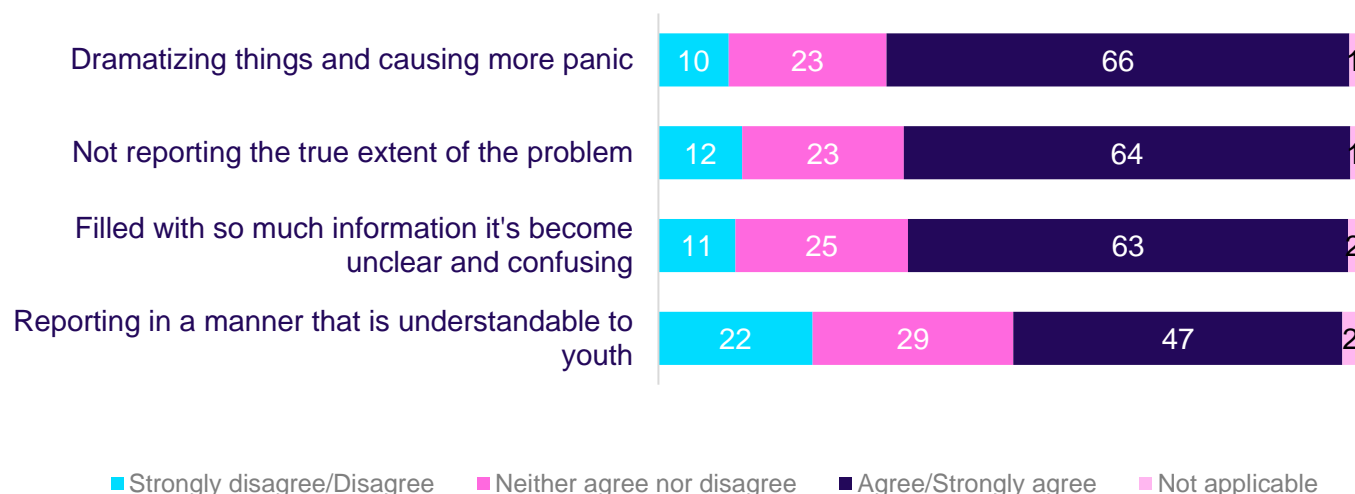


Figure 11: Assessment of media reporting

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (score '1' means you strongly disagree and score '5' that you strongly agree with the statement) Unit: %



YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS ON GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS

“ While most young people supported lockdown measures and claimed compliance with public health guidelines, they strongly opposed mandatory immunization. Although they neutrally assessed the overall government’s approach to pandemic management, they thought the government failed to include their needs and concerns in its response and effectively supported them in facing negative impacts of the pandemic.

Backdrop

It should be noted that following the 2020 elections in Montenegro there were effectively two governments managing the Covid-19 crisis. The first one was in office since the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020 and during summer, whereas the second one was formed in November 2020, following the August 2020 elections. Montenegro dealt exceptionally well with the first wave of the coronavirus, with a prompt border shutdown in March, introduction of timely and well-communicated measures, and well-established coordination of state bodies. Measures taken to prevent the spread of the virus were largely respected during the first wave. The government containment measures have been eased and tightened interchangeably and differently across regions/municipalities depending on the

epidemiological situation. Among others, they included the following: mandatory wearing of masks indoors and outdoors, mobility and event restrictions (country-wide curfews, including the prohibition of leaving the place of residence during weekends), nonessential business restrictions, travel restrictions, etc.²³

As mentioned earlier under the Society section, the authorities appeared to have a problem applying equal standards to violators of security and travel restrictions. While the authorities initially emphasised scientific and epidemiological arguments for their measures, which resulted in high levels of trust and compliance with imposed rules,²⁴ during the summer before the new government was formed, the ban on public gathering was no longer seen as a health-imposed measure but something that authorities were doing selectively, targeting the opposition and protesters. By failing to apply the same treatment to all citizens, the government’s approach to management of the pandemic has created confusion and lack of respect for official regulations. This atmosphere polarized the perceptions on how the authorities were handling Covid-19. However, it should also be stressed that our survey questionnaire did not differentiate between the old and the new government, which we believe is a shortcoming of this section.

²³ OECD (2020). [COVID-19 Crisis in Montenegro](#).

²⁴ United Nations (2020). [UN's Socio-Economic Response Plan to COVID-19 for Montenegro](#).

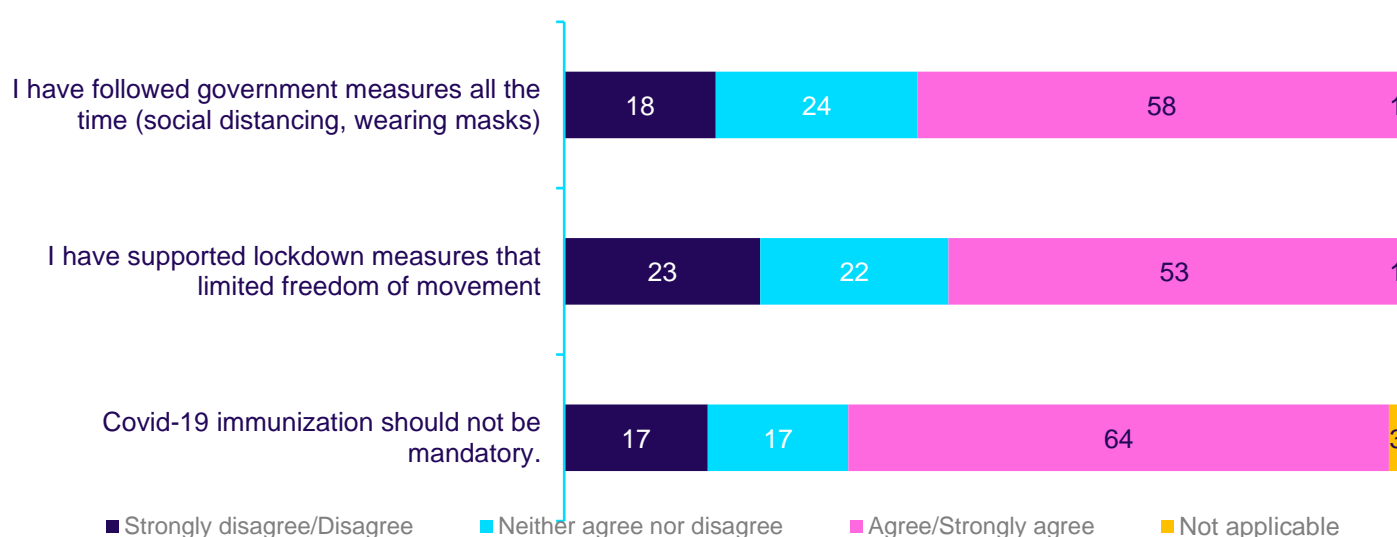
Findings

The majority of young people in Montenegro have supported the government's measures to contain the pandemic, with the level of support varying across age, level of education, and ethnicity. Most young people have supported the government's measures that limited the freedom of movement (53 per cent), while these types of measures were opposed by 23 per cent of respondents. Older cohorts were more likely to support those measures than the younger cohort. Furthermore, young people belonging to the Albanian ethnic minority expressed more support for those measures compared to young

people from other ethnic groups. Furthermore, a great share of youth (58 per cent) state that they have followed the government's instructions all the time (social distancing, wearing masks), as opposed to 18 per cent of them who admit that they have not been very compliant with measures all the time. A higher level of educational attainment and employment predicted a greater degree of compliance with epidemiological measures. In regard to immunization, almost two-thirds of surveyed youth oppose mandatory immunization (64 per cent, **Figure 12**).

Figure 12: Attitudes towards government's crisis response

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (score '1' means you strongly disagree and score '5' that you strongly agree with the statement) Unit: %



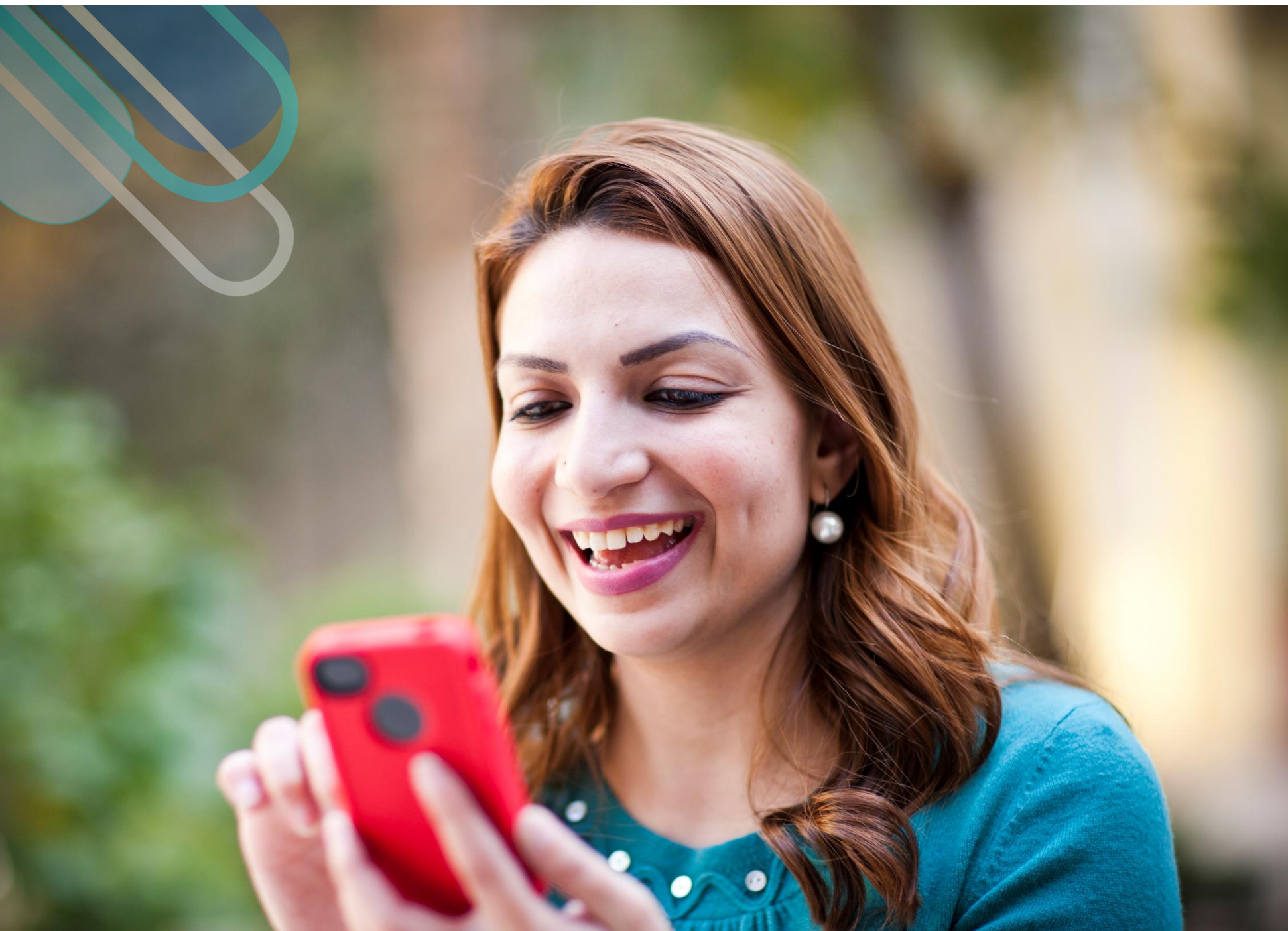
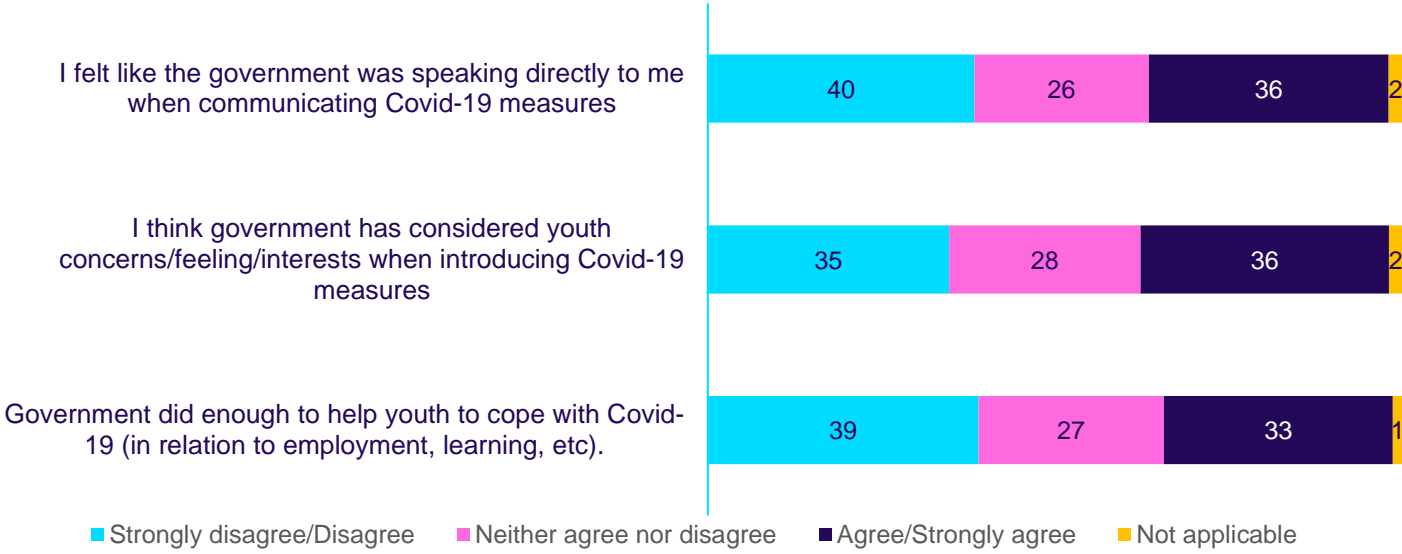
Young people tend to neutrally assess the government's approach to pandemic management. This assessment was done against four dimensions: communication, adequacy and proportionality, effectiveness, and evidence of measures. Responses to most questions are distributed around the arithmetic mean ranging from 3.05 to 3.14 on a scale from 1 to 5. The assessment does not differ by gender, age, educational level, or employment status. However, it does differ by ethnicity and place of residence. Compared to other ethnic groups, young Albanians more commonly agree that the government's messages related to Covid-19 have been clear and consistent, and that the measures were adequate and proportional in the given circumstances. Moreover, rural youth more frequently agree with the statement that the government's measures were effective in stopping the spread of the virus.

Young people in Montenegro think the government has not taken sufficient care of them in its response to the pandemic, with variations observed across urban/rural and ethnic divides.

Young people tend to neutrally assess the government's consideration of youth concerns/interests when introducing Covid-19 measures (mean 2.91 on a scale from 1 to 5, **Figure 13**). However, they tended to feel that the government was not speaking directly to them when communicating Covid-19 measures (mean 2.76) and that it did not provide enough support for youth to cope with Covid-19 in relation to employment and learning (mean 2.81). The survey suggests that a greater share of urban youth than rural youth felt neglected by the government during the pandemic, as they more commonly state that the government did not consider their interests/concerns enough (mean 2.76 vs 3.05) and did not help them enough to deal with the pandemic (mean 2.75 vs 2.86). Moreover, young ethnic Serbs tend to feel more

neglected by the government than main sample: they felt less addressed by government communication (mean 2.78), their interest/concerns were considered less when Covid-19 measures were designed and introduced (mean 2.6), and they were less supported in coping with the pandemic’s negative impact (mean 2.49).

Figure 13: Government measures and youth
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Unit: %



FUTURE OUTLOOK: HOPES, CONCERNS, AND ASPIRATIONS

“ **Adverse employment prospects, educational loss, and overall erosion of the social fabric together shape the negative future outlook, which increased dramatically for young people in Montenegro. While in 2019 as many as 76.9 per cent were hopeful about their future, now only 8 per cent see their future in a positive light. Young people are worried the most about their employment prospects and the push for emigration has drastically increased: prior to the pandemic it was 26 per cent, whereas now it is over one third (39 per cent). Therefore, young people believe that addressing unemployment should be the government’s top priority in the post-Covid period, with a focus on subsidized employment and decreased corruption in the employment process.**

A sense of pessimism about the long-term impact of the pandemic on their own future prevails among young people in Montenegro. Although most of the youth have expressed hope that the pandemic presents an opportunity to change things for the better, it seems they have given up that hope when asked about the impact of the pandemic on their own life. A very small share of young people think that the pandemic will have a positive impact on their own future in the long run (8 percent) compared to those who see the impact of the pandemic as either neutral or negative (43 percent each). When these data are compared to youths’ views on the future just a year ago, we can sense the extent of the detrimental effect that Covid-19 has had on their future outlook. In 2019, young people in Montenegro expected their future to be better than the present (76.9 percent), and a very small percentage thought it would be the same (4.9 percent) or worse (1.7 percent).²⁵ Nevertheless, some of our focus group participants expressed greater agency towards their own future by stating, “*I will not allow the pandemic to shape my future, I will fight its negative impact with all my skills and knowledge*” (Male, 25) or “*I am the only creator of my future [...] the pandemic can have a minor impact on it but I will decide on the overall direction of my future*” (Female, 22).

The sense of pessimism among young people in Montenegro varies significantly across regions and ethnic groups. The negative expectations are expressed the most by youth living in the Southern region (55 per cent), while young people living in the Central region are at the opposite end (34 per cent). Albanian youth, compared to other ethnic groups, seem to be more negative about the long-term impact of Covid-19, since as many as 63 per cent think it will be very negative or negative. It is interesting to report that the employed youth are more negative about the longer-term effect of the pandemic on their future compared to the unemployed (45 vs 38 per cent).

Youth livelihoods and employment are expected to be most adversely affected over the next three years. It is no surprise that the youth in Montenegro

²⁵ Friedrich Ebert Study (2019). [Youth Study Montenegro](#).

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feel that opportunities for travelling abroad will be most negatively affected by the pandemic (55 per cent). Half of young people think that the pandemic will negatively affect their income and position in the labour market, compared to almost one in five who believe the effect will be positive (44 vs 18 per cent, respectively). Almost the same share thinks their career prospects will be harmed over the next three years (42 per cent). A less negative impact is expected in the area of health, including mental health, knowledge and skills, and relationships with others (33 per cent each). Additionally, approximately one-third of young people think that the pandemic will negatively impact their family and housing plans (30 and 34 per cent, respectively, **Figure 14.**)

A comparison between subgroups shows that students are predominantly concerned about their employment opportunities and income over the next three years: half of them (50 per cent) are negative or very negative about the impact of the pandemic on their employability and income. Surprisingly, a slightly higher share of those who are employed are concerned with the pandemic's effect on joining the labour market than is the case with the unemployed (43 vs 40 per cent, respectively). In terms of regional differences, the youth living in the southern region outnumbered other regions in their negative perception of the pandemic's impact on their near future: 55 and 56 per cent of them see their employment opportunities and income negatively affected by the pandemic, compared to 36 and 39 per cent of those living in the central region. Young Serbs are slightly more concerned with job opportunities and income than the main sample: 52 per cent of them see the impact of the pandemic as negative. Roughly twice as many Albanians than the main sample are more positive about the pandemic's impact on their knowledge and skills, relationship with others, health including mental health, family, and housing plans. Young Bosniaks more commonly than the main sample express the belief that the pandemic will harm their knowledge and skills (45 vs 33 per cent, respectively). Roma youth expect the most negative impact on their income (43 per cent).

As a consequence of the pandemic, young people in Montenegro expect that the world will be more digitalized. A great share of youth think that Covid-19 will force them to be more "digitalized" in the future: almost half of them (47 per cent) think they will use more digital services in the future, while 41 per cent think they will interact more with other people online. Furthermore, nearly one in three young people think they will use more online learning in the future. These findings are further reinforced by our focus group participants: *"IT technologies reached their full potential due to the pandemic and created more 'digital habits' that will continue to exist beyond the pandemic."* (Female, 22) *"I expect my life to*

become more digitalized due to the pandemic." (Male, 25)

Despite the prospect of a digital future, 51 per cent of young people in Montenegro are not worried about becoming alienated from other people. They expect an increase in domestic travel (51 per cent) at the expense of decrease of international travel (33 per cent). A larger share of youth think they will need a workplace instead of working remotely (37 vs 27 per cent). On a positive note, two in three young people think they will be more responsible for their actions in the future because of the Covid-19 pandemic (**Figure 15.**)



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Figure 14: Impact of Covid-19 over the next three year

When you think about impact of Covid-19 pandemic on your future over the next 3 years, what are your expectations of pandemic impact on? (score '1' means very negative and score '5' very positive) Unit: %

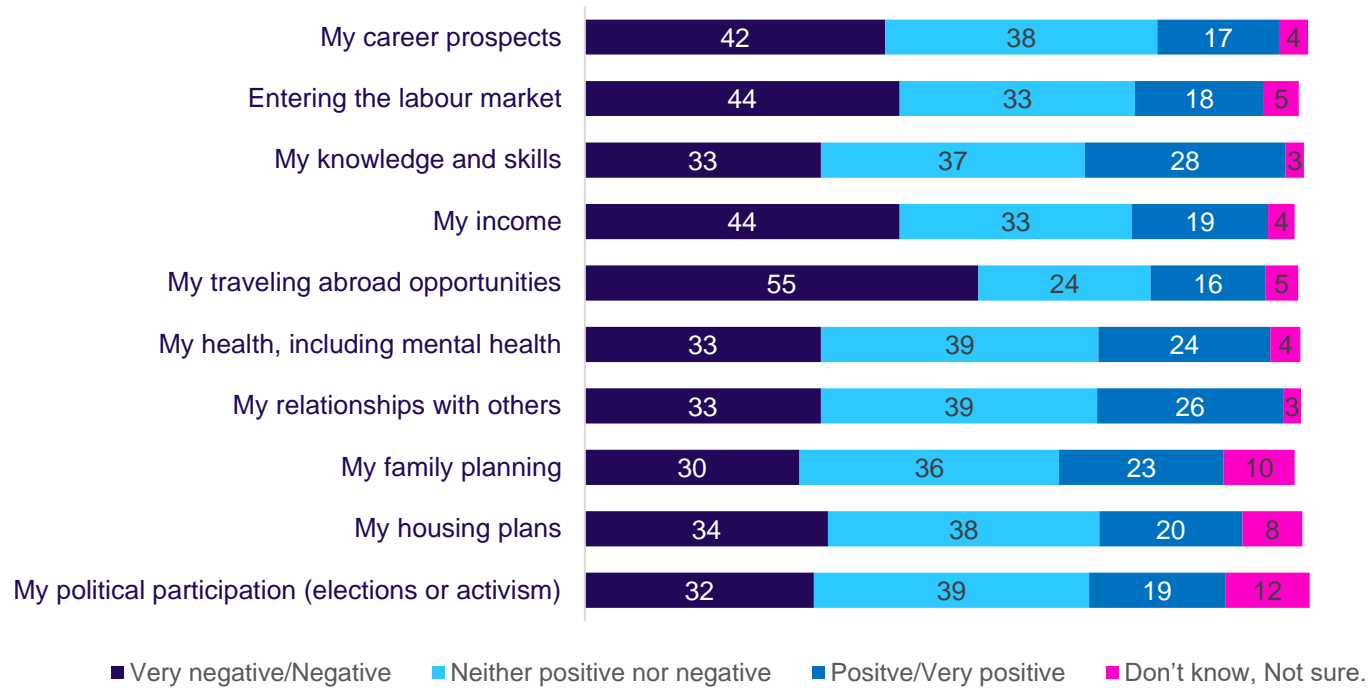
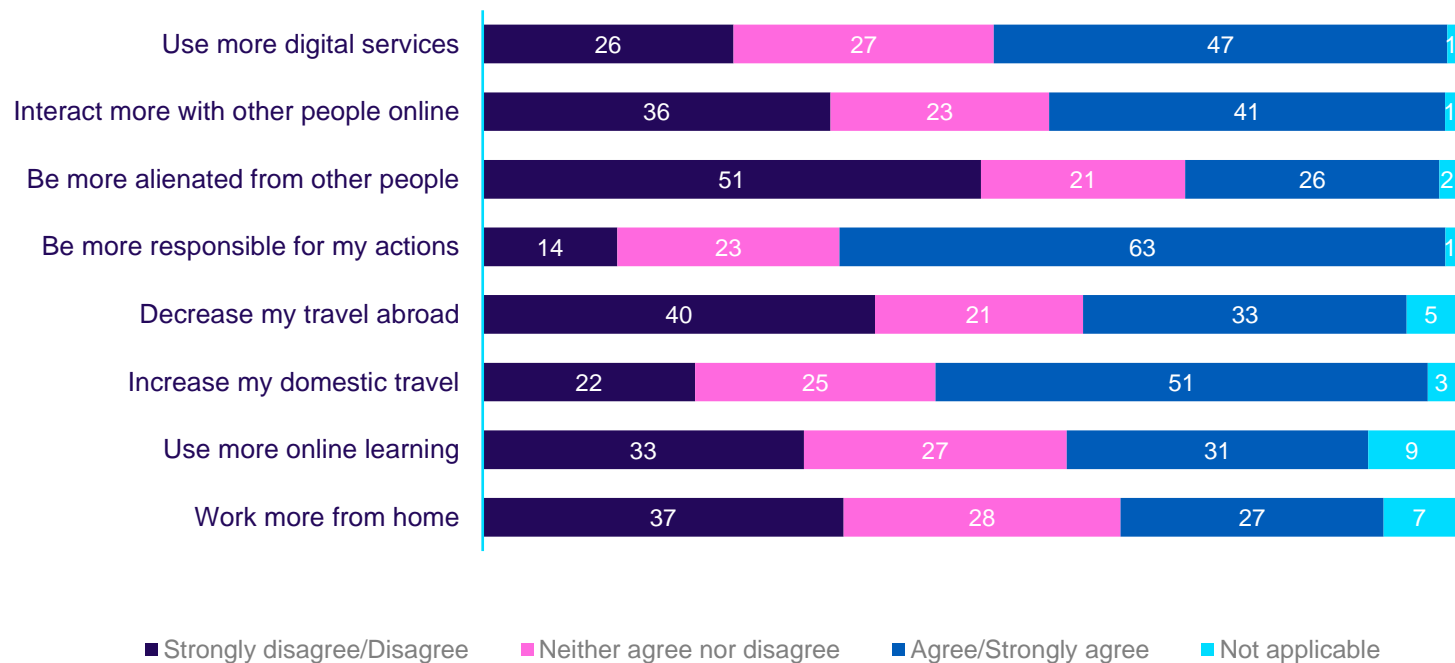


Figure 15: Impact of Covid 19 on future behaviours/practices

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Covid 19 impact on your future behaviours/practices compared to period before Covid 19? In the future, due to the pandemic I will... (score '1' means very negative and score '5' very positive) Unit: %



The Covid-19 crisis significantly increased the desire for emigration among young people in Montenegro. Prior to the pandemic, young Montenegrins showed the weakest motivation to emigrate compared to other Western Balkan countries (26 per cent).²⁶ Now one-fifth of respondents (20 per cent) would like to leave the country and study abroad as soon as the Covid-19 pandemic is over. The percentage is even higher when they are asked if they would migrate for employment reasons: 34 per cent of them would like to work somewhere outside of Montenegro. This answer was more commonly expressed by men rather than women, the unemployed rather than the employed, higher educated rather than lower educated, and urban rather than rural youth. In terms of ethnicity, the youth belonging to the Serbian and Bosniak minority were more likely to wish to leave the country for employment reasons. Furthermore, one in five respondents stated that the Covid-19 pandemic and the response of their government made them even more eager to leave the country.

However, while the pandemic has intensified the desire for migration, it also forced some young people to postpone or give up their migration plans, as expressed by focus group participants: *“I was planning to go to Germany to work, but in the meantime, they closed all the borders [...] it was impossible to get out of Montenegro. I was disappointed and gave up, but a friend of mine went away two or three days ago. Now I'm waiting to see what the situation will be like, so I'll go too.”* (Male, 26) *“I was supposed to go to Switzerland with my sister and be there for a while and look for some work. It's really uncertain now and will postpone it for some time.”* (Female, 24)

Young people believe that fighting unemployment should be the government's top priority in its post-Covid recovery efforts, followed by improvement of healthcare and social services, environmental protection, and quality of education. When young people are asked to make a list of priority areas for government spending in the post Covid-19 period, they stress the greatest need for funding in fighting unemployment caused by the pandemic: seven in ten young people put this as the top priority (71 per cent). In addition to fighting unemployment, they would like to see more investment in the improvement of healthcare services (59 per cent) and increased social benefits to those hit hardest by the pandemic (44 per cent). The other two focus areas of the government spending are environmental protection and quality of education (41 and 37 per cent). Little interest was expressed in investment in digitalization of public services, as well as arts and culture (9 and 4 per cent, respectively).

Young people have outlined different priorities for the government, depending on their urban or rural background, as well as ethnicity. Rural youth prioritize fighting the unemployment caused by the pandemic less than urban youth (64 vs 72 per cent), but they more commonly state they would like to see more investment in improving the quality of education (48 vs 32 per cent). The investment priority list is slightly different for young Roma: fighting unemployment is at the top of the list (67 per cent), followed by increasing social benefits for those in need whose situation has worsened due to the pandemic (56 per cent), and improvement of healthcare services (53 per cent). Improvement of environmental protection to fight climate change is among the top three priority areas for Bosniak and Albanian minorities (60 and 44 percent, respectively).

Employment is seen as the government's key measure that would benefit youth the most in the face of the negative impact of the pandemic.

When asked which measures would benefit youth the most in the post-pandemic period, young people in Montenegro opted for subsidised employment and decreased corruption in the employment process (58 and 55 per cent, respectively). Other measures include improved financial assistance to young people in need (41), improved access to funding for start-up businesses (36 per cent), increased housing subsidies for youth (33 per cent), and improved access to mental health services and their better quality (33 per cent, **Figure 16**).

Different subgroups would need different types of support to mitigate the negative effects brought on by the pandemic. Youngsters who experienced pay cuts and job losses during the pandemic said they would benefit from increased opportunities for paid internship and improved access to finance for business start-ups in addition to top three measures: subsidized jobs, less corruption in the process of getting employed, and financial aid to young people. The list of priority measures differs significantly between urban and rural youth. Compared to rural youth, urban youth prioritized decreased corruption in the employment process over subsidised employment as a top measure. Furthermore, while urban youth chose improved access to business start-ups in the top five measures, rural youth opted for improved access to and quality of mental health services.

People with disabilities think that they would most benefit from decreased corruption in the area of employment, followed by improved access to mental health services and better quality of those services, improved provision of skills for employability (IT, language, entrepreneurship skills), increased opportunities for paid internship, and improved financial aid to young people in need. Compared to

²⁶ Aspen Institute (2020). [Emigration from the Western Balkans](#).

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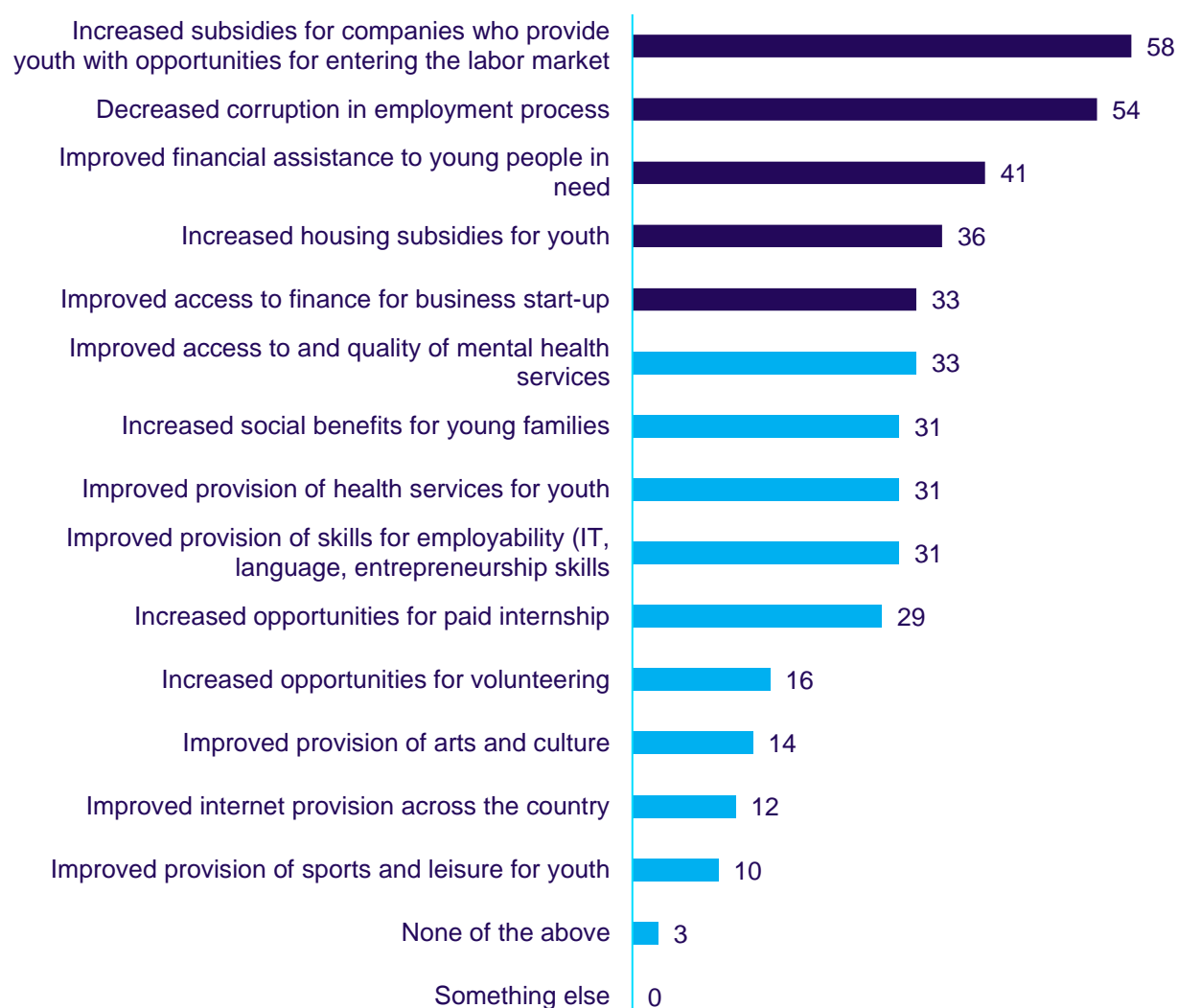
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Montenegro

the main sample, Roma youth would like to see improved provision of skills for employability instead of financial aid to young people in need and improved access to finance for business start-ups instead of housing subsidies. Members of the Bosniak youth minority see decreased corruption in the employment process as central to youth support measures (65 per cent).

Figure 16: Youth-specific measures

Which of the following measures would benefit youth the most in dealing with negative impacts of Covid-19? Please select top 5 priorities. Unit: %



GREEN MATTERS

65%

think that the Covid-19 outbreak has had a substantial positive impact on many aspects of the environment

64%

state that the Covid-19 outbreak increased their awareness about the importance of the ecology

64%

started to act more responsible towards the environment during the Covid-19 pandemic





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