



WORLD
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Statement - *For immediate release*

YMCA calls for urgent safety net policies for young people worldwide

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World Alliance of YMCAs

12 Clos Belmont - 1208 - Geneva - Switzerland | +41 22 849 51 00 | office@ymca.int | www.ymca.int

President: Patricia Pelton | Secretary General: Carlos Sanvee



1. How is COVID-19 affecting young people globally

COVID-19 is now affecting almost all nations on Earth, wreaking havoc on health systems and economies worldwide while deepening inequality at an unprecedented rate. As many countries are now approaching the end of the phase of the crisis we also start seeing more clearly its economic effects, which we expect to disproportionately affect young people worldwide. Young people are losing their jobs, face severe mental health challenges, face a deep educational crisis and increased inequalities.

The effects will be better understood and felt in the coming weeks and months, but young people are already strongly affected. Some of the effects include:

- **Mental health challenges due to isolation, anxiety, fear** (in some early studies 83% of young people polled said they are affected or severely affected by mental health problems because of the virus). This is even further affecting LGBTQ+ young people, where rates of depression and isolation were already high before the crisis.
- The unemployment rate in many countries is estimated to hit 30% and the young people will be disproportionately affected, especially those at the beginning of their careers. Many young people work in hardest-hit industries and have **seasonal/temporary/insecure/informal jobs** and are more likely to have their jobs or hours cut and risk long-term **unemployment or underemployment**;
- Vulnerable children and young people are missing the latest “digital wave” because they **do not have access to digital equipment**, increasing the gap further compared to those with more opportunities;
- The **growing gap between those who have good digital skills/ literacy and those who lack them** is now creating further victims of the crisis as some have opportunities to thrive and stay resilient (including through remote work which relies heavily on digital skills) while others do not have access at all to those opportunities;
- Many grassroots youth organisations are vulnerable and lack financial sustainability, which is leading to many closing down or reducing their services as they are hard hit by the crisis, **affecting in turn the access of young people to non-formal education and youth services**;



- Young people and teachers are suddenly finding themselves in an **e-learning environment that was not ready for such a crisis** in most countries, leading to considerable risks in terms of learning, exams and graduation;
- **For many young people this is the second major economic crisis they are facing in their lifetime**, severely curtailing their career development and family lives while in some cases also reducing their trust in their governments to support them when they are in need;
- Young people who live in unhealthy environments, such as **abusive homes or high-density populated areas where social distancing is not possible**, are at further risk of mental and medical harm;

We cannot afford to fail our young people today. They need all of us to connect in order to identify solutions which are best suited to each national and local context, and that needs to happen sooner rather than later.

A lack of action today can lead tomorrow to reduced youth civic participation and radicalisation of young people, as well as slower economic growth and increased pressure on social assistance and healthcare systems, with long-term negative effects on the mental health and resilience of young people.

On the positive side, we are also noticing that our planet is breathing again as humanity paused for a few weeks. With millions of young people calling for urgent climate action worldwide, we need to learn from the lessons of this crisis and use this opportunity to further push for green policies as we change our approaches and lifestyles in the post-pandemic world.

2. Solutions and Policy Recommendations

As one of the largest Youth Movements in the world with an active presence in over 120 countries, the **YMCA calls policymakers and encourages youth organisations to advocate for taking the following urgent measures for supporting young people worldwide and increasing their role in decision-making processes:**

A. Flexible and Sustainable Employment

- Introduce fiscal stimulus policies which encourage re-hiring of young people who were laid off;



- Simplify national legislation to encourage remote work and flexible working agreements while ensuring that adequate safety nets exist;
- Include young people with temporary/seasonal jobs in the existing government stimulus packages, where such stimulus exists;
- Encourage hiring of young people, particularly those with fewer opportunities, by temporarily reducing social contributions and taxes for work contracts;
- Change the paid furlough approach in order to encourage work even when the state support a portion of the employee's wage;
- Encourage intergenerational and diverse work environments, offering both financial sustainability for all and a better developed peer on-the-job learning system, with special attention to vulnerable young people;
- Ensure equal access to healthcare for young people of all backgrounds, including the unemployed or underemployed, including for eventual COVID-19 treatments and a vaccine when/if they appear;

B. Inclusive Education Online and Offline

- Facilitate orderly e-learning processes that take into account young peoples' and teachers' needs;
- Equip teachers with digital equipment and offer appropriate training for delivering e-learning content or adapting the existing curriculum to a digital environment;
- Equip students with fewer opportunities and those in institutional care with digital equipment (through vouchers or by loaning equipment provided by schools/universities);
- Increase investment in digital skills training across the board;
- Introduce student-debt stimulus by forgiving partially or fully education-related debt;
- Adopt agile upskilling/reskilling schemes which enable young people not enrolled in the educational system to quickly improve their skills, in partnership with employers;

C. Stronger Youth Work Sector

- Increase financial support for the nonprofit sector and particularly youth and non-formal education organisations to ensure (1) ability to survive after



the crisis and (2) capacity to serve the new community needs in a post-pandemic reality;

- Support the youth sector and educational organisations in providing counselling, skill development, re-skilling to affected young people;
- Increase investment in developing **digital youth work** services offered by youth organisations;
- Increase synergy between the government, the youth sector and the private sector in order to respond to the needs of young people in a sustainable way;

D. Resilient Young People

- Facilitate access to counselling and “safe spaces”, including “safe digital spaces” for young people who need mental health support;
- Encourage the development of value-based education and in general non-formal education provided by youth organisations with a deep focus on the current pandemic effects on young people (ex. through increased grants);
- Increase the role of young people and young leaders in decision-making, both in terms of policy and in adopting youth-led solutions at the level of civil society organisations;

Even if they now face an unprecedented crisis, young people are and will always be an inspiration for the world. With creative ideas and solutions, with passion and energy, with kindness and humanity, they will keep making our world a better place for all, including addressing the Sustainable Development Goals. But in order for them to keep doing that in the long run, we need our societies to support young people now more than ever with concrete action.