![arty - Digital art therapy for youth with developing or existing mental health conditions]

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RAISING AWARENESS
TOOLKIT

Impact of COVID-19 to young people with developing or existing mental health conditions

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Why this Toolkit?

ARTY project brings together actors from the fields of mental health, youth work, non-formal education, arts and culture. The consortium consists of seven partners from six Programme countries: Greece (KMOP), Cyprus (STANDO), Italy (ANS), Spain (INTRAS), UK (ARTIT) and Romania (ESTUAR and HABILITAS) covering a variety of backgrounds, ensuring the implementation of a multi-level and interdisciplinary project. The selection has been based on the partners' relevant work and experience in youth work, art and creativity, mental health, non-formal education and culture and on the complementarity they bring for the attainment of the objectives of the project, as well as a previous successful collaboration between organizations in other projects.

The aim of the ARTY project is to:

Source: ARTY project

1. Extend the competences of youth workers, psychologists, social workers and practitioners in Greece, Italy, Spain, Cyprus and Romania, who work with vulnerable youth with developing or existing mental health conditions, in order to be able to offer continuous support to their beneficiaries, even during lockdowns and quarantine situations, by utilizing digital art therapy.

2. Enhance access to CSOs, youth workers, psychologists, social workers and practitioners to a guide which links creativity and the role of art approaches when working towards mental wellbeing of young people. The guide will also include practical strategies to help youth with psychological disorders to address hidden pressures and stressors through art-making and exploration, showing the potential of art as a healing strategy.

3. Enhance access to CSOs and relevant stakeholders to an awareness-raising toolkit on the impact of COVID-19 on youth with developing or existing mental health conditions.

The findings of the European Parliament Research Service,have indicated that social isolation and uncertainty about the future, stemming from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, have caused significant levels of stress, anxiety, eating disorders, and even suicide among children and adolescents. The situation has been particularly challenging for young individuals with existing psychological distress, especially adolescent women.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 93% of countries have experienced paralysis or disruption to their mental health services due to the pandemic.

Non-governmental organizations, such as Save the Children and UNICEF, have calculated that anxiety and depressive disorders have increased almost four-fold, from 1.1% to 4%.

Additionally, diagnoses such as conduct disorders and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder have risen sharply, from 2.5% to 7%.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of young individuals has been felt beyond the initial months of the outbreak, during which confinement and infection prevention measures forced many to alter their routines and limit their social interactions. The repercussions have been more persistent and have left a deeper mark..

The WHO forecasts that mental health problems will affect approximately 25% of the global population. Despite more than half of young people admitting to experiencing mental health problems in 2022, almost half refrained from seeking professional help.

The reasons given for this reluctance include the cost of professional care, underestimation of the problem, resistance to sharing the issue with others, and stigma, which can generate feelings of shame and make it difficult to address.

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Source: ARTY project

What is this awareness kit for?

The Toolkit will enable the beneficiaries to raise public awareness, to lead and contribute to the development of youth policies and strategies to help youth with psychological disorders to address hidden pressures and stressors through **art making** and exploration, showing the potential of art as a healing strategy.

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Source: PIXABAY

The Toolkit objectives

The Toolkit has been designed to provide a picture of the impact COVID-19 on young people in the project member countries (Cyprus, Spain, Greece, Italy and Romania), in line with the following objectives:

- Identify and make visible a reality both in order to act on it and in terms of prevention.
- Reflect on the stigma of mental illness in the environment, respect diversity and not discriminate.
- Propose creative suggestions that can contribute to the well-being of youth with diagnosed or developing mental health disorders.
- Address a common challenge in partner countries, the EU and the world, in line with key principles and EU priorities

Who is this toolkit for?

This toolkit is intended to serve as a guide for NGOs and specialists. In this field, we include stakeholders such as CSOs, mental health and youth organizations, and the grassroots cultural and creative sector.

Basis and principles on mental health and youth

Protection and promotion of mental health and the well-being of young people are included in the fundamental principles and frameworks of the European Youth Strategy that is being implemented during the period 2019-2027.

This note also focusses on the EU Joint Action on Mental Health and Well-being and Sustainable Development Goals.

European Youth Strategy (2019 – 2027)

The EU Youth Strategy is the framework for EU youth policy cooperation for 2019-2027. It is based on the

adopted on 26 November 2018.

It aims to foster youth **participation** in democratic life, to support youth social and civic **engagement** and to **ensure** that all young people have the necessary resources to play their part in society.

The European Youth Goals identify areas that need to be addressed to enable young people to realise their full potential. Although these are non-binding targets, the EU Youth Strategy should contribute to the realisation of the vision they represent. It should mobilise instruments and stakeholders at the EU, national, regional and local levels.

Goal 5 on mental health and well-being and its targets, represent a great new opportunity to improve young people's mental health across Europe.

Through the two-year participatory process of the Youth in Europe, young people all over the EU identified mental health and well-being as a key area for action and cooperation.

Source: MHE

The European Youth Goal 5 on Mental Health & Well-being aims to achieve better mental well-being and end stigmatisation of mental health problems, thus promoting social inclusion of all young people.

Source: PIXABAY

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The Joint Action for Mental Health and Well-being (JA MH – WB)

The objective of the JA MH-WB is to contribute to the promotion of mental health and well-being, the prevention of mental disorders and the improvement of care and social inclusion of people with mental disorders in Europe.

The Joint Action addresses issues related to five areas:

- Promotion of mental health at the workplaces;
- Promotion of mental health in schools;
- Promoting action against depression and suicide and implementation of e-health approaches;
- Developing community-based and socially inclusive mental health care for people with severe mental disorders; and
- Promoting the integration of mental health in all policies.

Source: JA MH-WB EU

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Sustainable Development Goals

Mental health and psychosocial wellbeing were defined as an integral part of health by the WHO in 1978, and have been addressed in many UN resolutions. However, it is only recently that mental health has been included on the unified global agenda.

The third SDG focuses on good health and well-being and aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. This goal has thirteen targets, and Target 3.4 *aims specifically to reduce mortality from non-communicable diseases and promote mental health.*

Source: SDG Goals. United Nations

Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Source: PIXABAY

How was the toolkit developed?

The qualitative research method of focus groups was employed as the strategy to obtain results and gain a comprehensive understanding of the current reality. Through this method, feedback was analyzed and captured by facilitating the exchange of ideas among a variable group of individuals, guided by a moderator who posed relevant questions to elicit their ideas and opinions. A total of 100 focus groups were conducted across Europe, and their findings were taken into account.

Additionally, another 100 informal discussions were held, where the interviewer had an idea of the topics to be covered, but the questions emerged spontaneously during a participatory conversation, allowing for more flexibility and variation in the questioning process. These informal discussions provided further insight into the topics of interest.

Planification

To carry out this technique, it is essential to have a well-structured plan. It is important to formulate the points so that it is easier to verify if the proposed objectives are being achieved.

The focus groups and informal discussions have been designed to gather information from the stakeholders in regard to the following outcomes list:

- **Social issues** in relation to mental wellbeing of young people, particularly regarding the impact of corona crises;
- **Cognitive impacts** in relation to mental wellbeing of young people, particularly regarding the impact of corona crises;
- **Emotional aspects** in relation to mental wellbeing of young people, particularly regarding the impact of corona crises;
- Identifying mental health **challenges**;
- Identifying **needs and recommendations** to be done;
- Identifying **awareness raising tools** and practices to utilize per audience;

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Source: ARTY project

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

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Source: ARTY project

Participant profile

After defining the action plan, the next step was to identify and engage the relevant stakeholders who would be instrumental in achieving the desired outcomes. This included policy makers, advocacy and policy officers of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), mental health organizations, cultural and creative sector grassroots, and other relevant stakeholders who work with the youth.

In order to ensure a comprehensive approach, stakeholders from five different countries across Europe were selected to participate in the process. These countries included Cyprus, Spain, Greece, Italy, and Romania. By engaging stakeholders from multiple countries, the initiative was able to leverage a diverse range of perspectives, expertise, and experiences in the pursuit of the desired outcomes.

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Source: ARTY project

A total of **240 professionals** were involved in this stage of ARTY's project, representing a diverse cross-section of stakeholders with relevant, knowledge, and experiences. By involving together this range of stakeholders, the initiative was able to access a broad range of perspectives and insights, which helped to inform the action plan and increase the chances of success. The participation of these stakeholders played a crucial role in the strategy's success, and their contributions were essential to achieving the desired outcomes.

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

Source: ARTY project

Source: ARTY project

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*Once all the informal discussions and focus groups
have taken place, results have been categorized in line with the
action plan*

Understanding the current situation about mental health in young people

Although adolescence is generally considered a time of good general health and good mental health and a majority of young men and women do not suffer from any type of mental disorder, it is also the period of life when the most serious mental disorders begin[1].

The real testimonies of more than two hundred European professionals related to the mental health and youth sector in different ways (educational, cultural, medical, sociological) show us the impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the mental health of young people at a socially, cognitively and emotionally level. Also thanks to this reflection we have detected new challenges and needs in terms of mental health and well-being of our young people.

The results that we show below, aim to make an invisible reality visible.

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Young people are our future.

We must support and care for their mental health

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[1] INJUVE (2018): Youth Studies Magazine. Promotion of mental health, prevention of mental disorders and fight against stigma. Strategies and resources for the emotional literacy of adolescents.

Mental health status in young people

Source:PIXABAY

Source: ARTY project

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Social issues

Source:PIXABAY

REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES

"The impact of COVID-19 has been the **result of previous inequalities** and, at the same time, has **perpetuated** and **increased** them."

"Let's remember that for the adolescent the most important thing is still **being with their peers**. Let's try to **empathise** with that and let's not minimise their need to meet his friends."

"Young people move between the two poles of the same continuum: on the one hand, they have an increased **need for socialisation**; on the other, they are **afraid of encounters**."

"Youth are reporting more **anxiety,** feelings of **isolation**, **loneliness** and many also report difficulty in engaging in intimate relationships and/or friendships."

"**Missing their social interactions** is even more difficult for youth than other age groups due to the paramount importance that the **social aspect gains** during youth ages."

"On the other hand, the **isolation** of the pandemic has also provided good points for young people to **develop other skills** and hobbies, focus more on families and spend time with their families. They discovered Zoom and **online tools** to **partially supplement** their face to face interaction."

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Source:PIXABAY-

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a **significant impact** on the well-being of young people, exposing the harsh reality of homes without basic technological infrastructure and creating challenges for online learning and access to food. Distance education has widened the social divide, with those who had the economic and socio-cultural resources being able to continue their education, while those who did not have such resources fell behind.

Due to mobility restrictions, the lack of social interaction has resulted in social anxiety, fear of connections, and isolation, which could hinder the social development and skills of young people. The pandemic has also deprived young people of the daily experience of being with their friends, which is essential for socializing and empathizing with peers, leading to a loss of enjoyment of being with people, with introverts being at higher risk. Many young people reported feeling a lack of connection and a sense of belonging, which are basic human needs that are especially important for them. The absence of social interactions and the loss of important events have been particularly stressful factors. Despite the increase in mental health problems among young people, many people do not recognize the signs and seek help, particularly in rural areas.

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This situation has not prevented the pandemic from having some positive effects, such as adopting a healthier lifestyle and developing online skills.However, it is important to teach young people how to protect themselves online, as technology has both benefits and negative aspects that young people need to discern between.

Young people experience social relationships differently from adults, and they require opportunities to socialize with their peers. As the pandemic has limited those opportunities, it is important to focus on finding alternative ways to support their social development and mental well-being.

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of providing adequate technological infrastructure and social support systems for young people, especially during times of crisis.

Young people need to access online learning, alternative sources of food, and mental health support. They also need opportunities to socialize with their peers and develop the necessary skills to relate to others and deal with problems. It is essential to recognize that the school went on focusing mainly on content and leaving out the psychological and moral difficulties of the youth, which had major psychological implications on them.

REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES

"Yes, we have noticed an **increase in the number of young people affected** by the Covid 19 pandemic. Around 20% of the young people who did not have problems, acquired **behavior problems**, aggressive, physical and verbal behaviors, anxiety, increased stress level. I believe that the pandemic has affected the of desire of young people to get involved in activities, acquiring a lot of fears and anxiety about the future. **Warning signs** that families and carers should look out for in young people to **prevent their mental deterioration** may be refusal to engage in activities, refusal to engage in social activities and accepting advice, aggressive language and inappropriate behaviors. The mobility restrictions affected young people because they feel discouraged about their security and future. **Technology can represent a benefit** if young people follow mobilizing behaviors with its help, otherwise they will be negatively influenced. **Young people should be supported**, taught about the methods of choosing real news, improving their critical thinking and **guiding them to avoid the negative parts of the Internet.** "

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"Due to the pandemic and the isolation, young people suffered a lot because they could **no longer create normal relationships** with those around them."

"**Online communication cannot completely replace** contact with others. Young people have lost many **social skills** and now it is difficult for them to re-involve themselves in social activities, showing quite a lot of disinterest."

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Source: ARTY project

Mental health status in young people

Source:PIXABAY

Source: ARTY project

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Cognitive impacts

Source: PIXABAY

REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES

"The footprint of the pandemic is leaving consequences depending on their abilities: **if children and adolescents had difficulties before, the pandemic probably made them worse**."

"As teachers, as parents and as a society, we have the **obligation and responsibility to counteract the deficiencies** derived from the pandemic in cognitive, social and psychomotor matters."

"The most difficult thing was to explain the situation to the **youth with cognitive disabilities**, to find a way of explaining the reason for this emergency but without frightening them. Their **routines were altered** and in some cases we saw an **increase in problematic behaviour**."

"According to psychologists, young people may not be exposed to social interaction and **lose opportunities** to travel, attend education and gain different life skills. It may be challenging for young people to adjust and cultivate the skills they need through **online learning minimising mobility**."

"We identified young people who were affected by the pandemic. I have been working in the child protection system for 18 years and I have noticed a change. They are **more aggressive** verbally, they **no longer have patience** with each other or with the educators. They no longer have patience even at work and because of this conflicts arise. They are more **nervous**. I have noticed these **changes in 75% of the young people** I work with. "

"From a cognitive point of view, young people were **affected from an academic point of view**. The learning model they were following before the pandemic was affected and thus it is harder for them to get involved in learning activities. **They did not have the necessary materials in the online environment**."

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Source:PIXABAY

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a cognitive impact on young people, according to reports from participants. It has been observed that the pandemic has increased the rates of radicalisation and polarisation among young people, causing cognitive and temporal distortions, difficulty or refusal to process events, and reduced creativity. The passivity of adolescents has become even more extreme due to the use of masks and the digitisation of social and school life. This has led to concerns among young people about falling behind academically, losing the ability to concentrate on studies, and experiencing anxiety in social settings or public spaces. Even adolescents with disabilities are not exempt from the cognitive effects of the pandemic, and professionals who work with youth with cognitive disabilities have found it difficult to explain the COVID-19 emergency situation to them without frightening them. The situation becomes more worrying if we add the use of screens, which has been shown to make people less empathetic to the same effect associated with the use of masks.

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In addition to these cognitive impacts, young people have also experienced symptoms similar to those associated with mental health problems. This includes confusion in thinking or reduced concentration ability, significant tiredness, low energy, and problems sleeping, and an inability to cope with daily problems or stress. Moreover, the pandemic has also impacted the cognitive development of adolescents and young people. Remote learning, disrupted schooling, and reduced opportunities for socialization may result in learning loss, reduced motivation, and poorer academic outcomes. During the pandemic, young people tended to spend more time online, leading to the creation of a dependency on certain technologies. Prolonged exposure to screen time and reduced physical activity can also have negative effects on brain development and cognitive function.

Taking into account the above findings, it is crucial to be aware of the cognitive impact of the pandemic on young people and take steps to mitigate it, including providing mental health support and finding alternative ways to support their social development and well-being.

Mental health status in young people

Source:PIXABAY

Source: ARTY projectc

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Emotional aspects

REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES

"With nothing to do back home, many teenagers have turned to screens/videogames/smartphones to pass the time. **Increased screen time directly leads to effects on mental health**, including anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances."

"Technology helps the beneficiaries take care of, they use **social networks very often**. They have found an attractive way to communicate through free messaging with the help of voice messages. Unfortunately, virtual autism can set in and it can **decrease the performance of young people in other activities including personal hygiene, chronic fatigue or even from an ophthalmological point of view**. This is where the conflicts with adults come from.

"

"From an **emotional point of view**, young people without the support of adults, a person with knowledge, to teach about the dangers that exist online, can become **the prey of people behind the screen who do not have favourable intentions for the person in question**. Unfortunately, during the pandemic, young people had a **low ability to self-regulate emotionally**, and thus there can be **physical aggression**, **depression**, **anxiety** and even **suicidal ideas.**"

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Source:PIXABAY-

Source:PIXABAY

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental health of adolescents, intensifying the trend of worsening moods, noting greater effects among young women than among young men.The separation from friends and loved ones, loss of freedom, and uncertainty about the future due to the effects of the disease have generated **feelings of anger, stress**, and even **suicidal tendencies**.

Many mental health professionals noted **an increase in mental health cases**, **but** it is unclear whether the pandemic caused the increase or the youth have become more familiar with mental health services and more confident in using them. Warning signs could be changes in young people's behaviour and mood, such as behavioural difficulties, anger, low school attendance and motivation, poor involvement with peers, and tendency to risky behaviours. Any persistent and noticeable behavioural change should be taken seriously and explored further.

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The closure of schools and extracurricular activities has disrupted the daily routines of teenagers. Other emotional aspects appeared as side effects of staying too much online during lockdown, sometimes even up to 20 hours a day because there were no other activities to be involved in. Mobility restrictions have caused **insomnia**, **excessive sleeping**, **lack of appetite**, or **excessive eating**.

Adults should pay attention to any changes in a child's behavior and affective state compared to the previous period, including reluctance to communicate, inhibited behavior, unexplained behaviors, dropping grades at school, school disinterest, elements of depression, and feelings of helplessness. Mobility restrictions have impaired communication and negotiation skills, which are necessary for face-to-face communication, leading to dangerous behaviors and more irritability.

It is possible that the **child does not understand the true intention of the parent who wants to help him understand the possible dangers and may perceive them as an aggressor or an enemy.** is important to address these issues and provide support to help young people overcome the challenges of the pandemic.

Source:PIXABAY

REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES

"It is recommended that **adults** in charge of minors make an effort to set an example and also **express their own emotions**, not limiting communication to the practical aspects of the disease, and that they request psychological help if needed.

"For proper development in childhood and adolescence, **routines and healthy lifestyle habits** are necessary.

"The **violation of their rights and their living conditions** led to the acquisition of **anxiety** disorders, **panic** attacks and **resignation syndromes**"

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"In the peer groups, I observed a marked **difficulty in looking at each other's faces**, in particular between boys and girls and also a fair amount of **anger**."

"Children became **more familiar with illness and death** and parents had to face different challenges explaining to children the current situation. In addition to that, all processes became online and young people had to **adjust to new circumstances**. This result is not very negative if you consider that in 2 months, everyone was obliged to learn how to use digital tools for their work and education."

Mental health status in young people

Source:PIXABAY

Source: ARTY project

Challenges detected

REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES

"The **stigmatisation of young people** in the coronavirus is a very **dangerous** breeding ground"

"The role of **new technologies in eating disorders** is a clear aggravating factor. Exposure of hyper-thin bodies, viral challenges, you have to be very attentive to the symptoms to make a **premature detection** of possible problems."

"I heard about a (psychiatric) **hospital** where **teenagers stayed on the floor**, because all the beds were occupied during pandemic"

"The school has become more and more distant from the families and they are struggling. In fact, we have had a **boom in requests to be taken in by the services**."

"In general, we found that with the **development of technology**, more and more children and young people have access to phones, and thus **immerse themselves in the online environment**, thus breaking away from reality. Unfortunately, many **no longer know how to socialise**, they become **less empathetic** and have more **frustrations**. Becoming dependent on the online environment, they end up **procrastinating** many of the duties they have."

"The **main problem that young people** face today, especially because of the pandemic and the restrictions that existed, is **given by the way technology has come to be**. Unfortunately, young people have become increasingly dependent on technology and use it in ways that are unfavourable to their future."

Source PIXABAY

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The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on young people, **increasing risk factors** and **decreasing protective factors**. With lockdowns and mobility restrictions, adolescents have been forced to stay indoors, exacerbating mental health issues and increasing the risk of cyberbullying. Family fragilities have been particularly affected, with professionals reporting an increase in family violence worldwide, including violence against partners and children. Technology has played a significant role in exacerbating mental health issues, with increased dependence on social networks leading to self-harm, eating disorders, and suicidal ideation. Low-quality education during lockdowns and difficulties adapting to new conditions have also led to reduced school performance and challenges in returning to offline normality.

Additionally, educators have commented that the pandemic has affected the job market, with unemployment increasing, and many students quitting their studies due to the circumstances. Professionals are now faced with several questions regarding addressing mental health struggles and new routines, maintaining connections with human beings, controlling irrational beliefs related to the virus, and more. Families and caregivers should take note of changes in young people's behavior, such as increased aggression or withdrawal, as these may indicate a lack of skills in expressing emotions.

Despite these challenges, there have been some positive aspects of technology during the pandemic. Young people have had access to online learning and digital resources that have been helpful in keeping up with educational activities. However, there is a concern about dependence on technology and its potential negative effects.

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Overall, professionals have identified a regression on several levels for young people, which has impacted their didactic activities, socialization, and extracurricular activities. It is important to address these challenges and provide support to young people as they navigate the post-pandemic world.

Source:PIXABAY

Creative Awareness Tools

Creative Awareness Tools are essential for individuals to explore themselves, foster their imagination, and develop their personality. The pandemic has brought about an exponential increase in the availability of digital artistic resources in the form of memes, providing a much-needed escape for the public. In addition, professionals have provided online resources such as tutorials for painting, music, and dance that have combined learning with hobbies, allowing for moments of concentration, attention, movement, and creative development.

"It was more about practising a favourite hobby, so the mood lift is immediate"

"In order to ensure the attention of young people, it is necessary first of all to have a suitable space, a pleasant environment, an attractive presentation of the service, the presentation of information about the service for accommodation, prior training, and work materials. The trainer's ability to capture the students' attention is also very important."

To engage the youth, professionals recommended using artistic activities that express their preferences and interests. Artistic activities such as **drawing, collage, and manual work** can be chosen according to the individual's interests and problems. Interaction with these activities two to three times a week is recommended. **Working with clay, painting, dancing, and music** are also recommended artistic activities that should be implemented at least once a week, especially for young people involved in the labour market, where artistic activities can serve as a method of stress relief.

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Board games and ludo-therapy can be implemented daily or at least two to three times a week, with free resources such as the internet and outdoor movement also being utilized. **Melo-therapy, ludo-therapy, and art-therapy** are activities that can be implemented at least twice a week, depending on the individual's preferences, desires, and abilities. **Photographic art** is another recommended activity that can be implemented once a week.

Depending on the individual's preferences and abilities, any artistic activity that can lead to self-discovery and relaxation can be chosen. While technology offers enormous possibilities, it also has inherent dangers that depend heavily on an individual's sense of limits. Some teenagers need guidance when using technology, and it is important to examine the boundaries. During the pandemic, video calls were extremely important in maintaining relationships and routine, as well as promoting self-care.

"Mental Health Apps and Learning Platforms are essential in guiding teenages in this crazy online environment. We know that technology can be dangerous but we can not move back in time. So, let's focus on what we can build and improve."

"Artistic activities help because they distract them from negative things, disconnect them from the negative parts they encounter in life and help them get over difficult periods."

With so much of their social and educational lives now taking place online, traditional methods of communication may not be as effective as they once were. By using creative digital tools, such as social media campaigns, interactive videos, and gamification, messages can be made more engaging and memorable for young people. These tools can help ensure that important messages are received and understood by young people, and also provide an opportunity for individuals to explore themselves, foster their imagination, and develop their personality.

This Toolkit includes resources that are specifically designed to help Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) identify **warning signs of emotional distress in young people** and **select appropriate artistic-therapeutic or creative activities to promote positive mental well-being**. These resources are meant to be effective and creative, providing CSOs with a range of options to choose from. Additionally, the Toolkit includes **tips and creative activities to help combat stress, anxiety, and isolation**, which can be very useful for young people.

It is also crucial for CSOs to understand the main guidelines for **seeking help** and to **establish prevention protocols for young people's mental health**. This audience needs to be aware of the appropriate steps to take when dealing with a young person's mental health concerns, and protocols should be put in place to prevent mental health problems from occurring in the first place. By following these guidelines and protocols, CSOs can play an important role in promoting positive mental health outcomes for young people, which is more important now than ever before.

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 These tools based on creative resources are offered in the form of technical sheets, which can be utilized in face-to-face workshops and also digitally through files 2that can be spread in social media.

In workshops, these resources facilitate the transmission of information, foster discussions, and promote understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth mental health. Additionally, the digital version of the tools empowers users to reach a wider audience through social media platforms, spreading awareness and initiating conversations on this crucial topic.

"*I have seen the positive effects of using technology particularly with young people with disabilities or motor difficulties. For me, technology is a tool for promoting inclusion and experimentation.*"

Tool title:	Warning signs of emotional distress in youth
Aim:	By the end of this infographic, readers will be able to: • Recognize the most common signs that indicate emotional distress in youth; • Give original examples of signs based on their experience with young people; • Discuss the most common signs of emotional distress with their colleagues and other stakeholders.
Technique	Infographic
Description:	**Emotional state** • Hypersensitivity and anger outbursts • Anxieties and phobias that did not exist before • Panic attacks • Anhedonia • Short-term tantrums • Excessive crying or irritation • Low tolerance • Sadness • Apathy - Loss of initiative or desire to participate in any activity • Disinterest • Feelings of helplessness • Increased anxiousness • Anger • Extreme mood changes • Feelings of fear (even if there is no conscious reason) • Feelings of extreme guilt or shame • Self-critical remarks • Feelings of helplessness to change a situation • Feelings that things will never get better **Social behavior** • Changes in how (s)he communicates his/her feelings • Social withdrawal and isolation - disinterest in social activities • Low desire to interact with those around • Verbal and physically abusive behaviours • Aggression - Temper outbursts and/or violent episodes • Reluctance to communicate - inhibited behavior • "Acting out" behaviours in teens • Resist authority • Become disruptive or aggressive at home or in the classroom **Physiological signs** • Eating disorders and/or weight fluctuation • Dermatological and auto-immune issues • Gastrointestinal disturbances • Fatigue or reduced energy • Unexplained headaches or body pain

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- Increased sensitivity — Heightened sensitivity to sights, sounds, smells or touch; avoidance of over-stimulating situations.

Cognitive aspect
- Difficulties paying attention and concentrating (including forgetfulness and distraction)
- Poor memory
- Problems thinking — Problems with logical thought and speech that are hard to explain

Academic life
- Changes in life plans
- Decrease in involvement/desire to access the labour market.
- Dropping grades at school, school disinterest
- Skipping school or classes

Routines and Habits
- Changes/Decline in self-care
- Changes in sleeping and/or eating habits (including sleeping or eating too little or too much)
- Avoiding activities enjoyed in the past
- Dangerous behaviours or actions that could lead to self-harm or harming others
- Experiment with high-risk behaviours such as underage drinking or prescription drug misuse and abuse

| References: | American Psychiatric Association (n.d.) *Warning Signs of Mental Illness*. https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/warning-signs-of-mental-illness

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 ARTY's project focus groups and informal discussions. |

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Source:PIXABAY

Tool title:	Selection of art-therapeutic/creative resources useful for the adolescent group
Aim:	At the end of this presentation, the learner will be able to: • Know the main digital art resources and techniques to use with adolescents online or face-to-face; • Select digital resources, such as apps and programmes, to implement individual/group art activities addressed to adolescents; • Organise digital art activities to be carried out in presence, online or in a hybrid form to positively impact on adolescents' well-being and mental health
Technique	Infographic
Description:	**Black-out poetry** Black-out poetry is the literary equivalent of collage. It is obtained by starting from an already written page and deleting all the words that do notbelong to the composition. The end result is a visual poem, to be read butalso looked at. It is a tool that lends itself well to being used in a group context, such as that of adolescents. Structuring an activity using the black-out poetry with adolescents affected by the pandemic to reflect on their past and present experience, for example, would facilitate theirexpression without over-exposing themselves, as well as being an opportunity to raise awareness about themselves and their well-being. Making them choose the source text can facilitate their verbal and non- verbal expressive unlocking. To make this combination of cognitive and expressive-artistic process possible, try the free app Blackout Bard to create unique poems or, if you prefer, watch this tutorial to create a 'hidden'poem directly with Google! **The comic strips** The comic strip lends itself well to self-telling for its ability to simply mix reality with the author's imaginative thought, combining the typical strengthof introspective storytelling with visual immediacy. Manga, in particular, is one of the most popular comics among teenagers as it narrates the everyday life of teenagers between school, first loves, family and sport, encouraging a strong identification. Therefore, the world of Manga can become an important and valuable tool to enter the world of these teenagers, to listen to them and to grasp the symbols they use to define themselves and their sufferings. This can be done by structuring a comic creation activity using the simple web service Pixton that makes it easy tocreate comics. **Video & Digital storytelling**

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Digital storytelling is the practice of using new technologies to tell stories. Digital storytelling means creating a short and harmonious mix of text, graphics, recorded narration, video and music to present information on a specific topic. Like traditional storytelling, digital stories revolve around a topic, free or suggested, and always start from a subjective point of view. Organising digital storytelling workshops for adolescents means structuring for them a time of self-learning and self-reflection on their own selves and experiences. In fact, the choice of different narrative elements implies a moment of reflection and research oriented towards self-reflection: which image represents me best, which words, which music? Canva, YouCut, iMovie and Microsoft's Video Editor are some useful digital tools for creating digital storytelling. Check here how to create a digital story!

Photography

Taking photographs is a way of experimentation and self-narrative, including through sharing one's growth process with peers. Photography can also be seen as an object of mediation to express an emotion, to transform what one feels into images and to visually represent an experience. Thus, organising photo workshops to reflect on a collectively experienced moment in life, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, can be an excellent opportunity to express and reflect together on what has been passed and experienced. Alternatively, you can always opt for photo- voice, a method through which teenagers take photos on a particular topicand reflect as a group in order to express one's point of view on a situation

such as the pandemic - to bring changes for the better. In this case, the photos are always accompanied by a legend to give the picture a specificmeaning. Useful photo-editing tools are Photopea, Google Foto, Snapseed, Microsoft's Foto and Canva.

Digital Collage

An online collage is a work of art in which different digital content is combined and layered into one large image, similar to a handmadecollage, except that there is no need to cut anything out or use paper andglue. One of the many advantages of digital photography is the ability to manipulate images as often as desired without changing the source file orhaving to cut physical prints of the images. An online collage composed ofdigital photos can be a great way to create a new piece of art, to express an emotion or experience. Among the programmes and apps that can help us create an all-digital collage, we cannot omit to mention Photoshop, Canva, Procreate App or Google Drawing.

Digital drawing

Drawing is an art-therapeutic technique par excellence. With the advent oftechnology, digital drawing, which consists of creating a drawing using graphic software, has become increasingly popular. Instead of using penciland paper, digital artists use a mouse or pen to draw on a tablet, computer,iPad or graphics tablet. So why not take advantage of this tool to organisea free or structured art activity for teenagers affected by the pandemic?

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For this we will need:

- Digital devices such as a tablet, iPad, computer and graphics tablet and any other accessories, such as a pen for drawing digitally;
- An application or programme for drawing digitally. The big names in software are [Adobe Photoshop], [Clip Studio Paint] and[Paint Tool SAI]. For lovers of Street Art, instead, it is very famous Vandaleak, the app for aspiring writers and streetartists that allows you to step into the role of a street artist.

Videogames and Role-playing games

Videogames can be a way to get closer to adolescents, to get to know them better and, finally, to know how to have an impact on their well-beingand mental health. There are many video games that can help us, but theones that combine creativity, imagination and socialisation are [Scribblenauts Unlimited, Minecraft, The Sims, Drawn To Life] and, for some aspects, also [Painting VR]. These games require creating characters, worlds, customised objects and interacting with other users and/or characters, which is an excellent opportunity for self-reflection. Theuse of avatars or characters created by the teenagers themselves can facilitate an intermediate step of questioning and choice in the teenager's discovery and construction of identity. For this reason, creating a personalised avatar can be an important activity for both the adolescent and the professional. Some tools for creating characters or avatars are Pixton, Gacha club, Avatar factory and Clay yourself.

In addition to video games, role-playing games can be a linking tool for older teenagers. Here, players take on the roles of characters in imaginaryor simulated worlds, under the direction of a master. They have ample opportunity for personal initiative, for improvisation and strategic intelligence. It is possible for the professional to supervise adolscents during online role-playing games [Tera Rising], [The Lord of the Rings] [Online], [Star Wars: The Old Republic], [Aion] and [Rift]; or to organise sessions of traditional role-playing games in presence or via video call with a groupof teenagers.

The Augmented Reality

If you also think that everyone has the potential to be creative and that technology can play a powerful role in unlocking that potential, then you should definitely try the SketchAR app. It is an app designed to facilitate the artistic process by supporting the practice of drawing even in the absence of the necessary skills. How? Using Augmented Reality, which adds detail to the visual field actually perceived by the person projecting images only in a limited area in front of one's eyes or by showing additional information on the display of the smartphone or tablet. Learn more about how to use the app effectively to implement activities for teenagers by checking out these [tutorials].

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The Virtual Reality

Virtual reality, with its visor helmets that completely preclude contact with the surrounding environment, allows us to physically and emotionally immerse ourselves in works of art... but also to create them. Tilt Brush and Kingspray Quest are in fact applications that allow us to create 3D artworks using virtual reality as a palette. A cheaper and equally effective solution is Google Cardboard, a visor helmet and Google app. Why not try wearing Google Cardboard to physically and psychologically merse yourself in a photo or location while simultaneously expressing your creativity on a real palette discovering the result only at the end?

The IA ART

Did you know that Artificial Intelligences are able to create works of art? Artificial intelligence can facilitate the expression of those who do not have particularly well-developed artistic skills, promoting the sharing of the interior world, deep feelings and also the adolescent's sense of self- efficacy and self-esteem. Midjourney is an artificial intelligence that enables the production of 2D works of art from a text called 'prompt' written personally by users in English. If you also want to learn how to use Midjourney, follow this tutorial and create unique artwork!

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Midjourney: The gothic AI image generator challenging the art industryhttps://www.sciencefocus.com/future-technology/midjourney/

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Source:PIXABAY

Tool title:	Tips against stress, anxiety and isolation
Aim:	**My hero** • Combating anxiety and isolation through discovering one's own qualities, improving self-esteem and self-confidence, identifying resources
Technique	Drawing
Description:	You will need a sheet of paper, coloured pencils/ markers. Draw a vertical line to divide the paper sheet in two. On the right side of the sheet, draw about all the reasons why your heroes seem strong to you. Identify their resources and their qualities. Before moving on to the next step, close your eyes for a few seconds and breathe deeply and slowly. On the left, draw what your life would be like if you were like them(for example - you could change your everyday life, you would be more respected, you would be taken seriously, etc.) Talk to your tutor/friend about the similarities between you and your heroes and about the resources you can borrow from them. Write down the resources and similarities on the paper After you have written down, display the drawings somewhere where you can see them or keep them close at hand, for the moments when you feel stressed, anxious, upset, etc. You can repeat the exercise whenever you feel the need, using a different "hero" each time. You can also repeat the exercise with the help of a friend or tutor. The participants will go through the steps presented above and at the end they will share the conclusions and reflect together on the following statements: *"THE PROFILE OF A CONFIDENT PERSON* • *Self-confident people are able to rely on their own abilities and decisions. Also, they are able to take control of their own lives and defend their rights.* • *Self-confident people are realistic. This does not mean that they are capable of doing anything. When their aspirations, goals are not fulfilled, they continue to adopt an optimistic attitude.* • *-Confident people are not overly dependent on others to feel good and are rarely self-critical. They are able to accept themselves as they are.*
References:	Another method of applying the exercise can be seen here, on page 28. Other resources: Art-therapy, Another way we can express or selves.- https://psychologyinterns.org/wp-content/uploads/Art-Therapy.pdf Art Activity - Emotions Map

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	https://artwithheart.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Emotions-Map- Lesson-Art-with-Heart.pdf Drawing on creative arts therapy approaches to enhance inclusive school cultures and student wellbeing https://www.iier.org.au/iier29/hannigan.pdf Art Therapy Worksheets https://www.carepatron.com/templates/art-therapy-worksheets
Aim:	**Mindfulness for eliminating stress a nd anxiety and for relaxation** • The goal is to achieve relaxation to reduce stress and anxiety
Technique	Mindful breathing
Description:	It is crucial to do the following before engaging in mindfulness exercises: • Choose the posture that is most comfortable for you, and then relax there as much as you can. • Begin by focusing on your body • Move on to your breathing • Pay attention to your emotions and feelings. • Breathing in a mindful way, as stated in this video, will help reduce stress, anxiety, panic attacks and will induce • calm and relaxation feelings. Young people can try this exercise for 5 minutes each day, and then after learning it they can use other relaxation music for repeating it as they chose.
References:	The mindfulness exercise can be accessed using the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DbDoBzGY3vo Other mindfulness music examples: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79kpoGF8KWU https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_kT38XB1YHo
Aim:	**My friend, The journal** • Improving the ability to express emotions and managing stress
Technique	Drawing/painting/collage
Description:	Choose a new diary/notebook. Think of it as a good, close friend and give it a name. Use the diary whenever you feel stressed, isolated or anxious. Using crayons, tempera or different images that you can stick, reveal the experienced situation. At the end, write on the page how it makes you feel. You can use the "Palette of Emotions" to be able to identify the emotion more easily. Document yourself about this emotion and identify useful strategies for the future. Keep your diary in a safe place and use it whenever you feel the need. A "creative journal" can be used for the personal development of young people / adolescents, and it represents an interesting artistic intervention. In this kind of journal, the owner can draw personal mandalas (representing one's identity or the relationships with the

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	exterior world) or can have a diary made out of collages (images and texts from journals and magazines combined with drawings and photos, paintings, or other materials). Keeping a journal every day, noting anything that you can think of, will enhance the wellbeing, stimulating self-esteem and expression of emotions and feelings in a creative way, making it easier to manage it and to prevent stress and anxiety.
References:	Other resources: 100 ArtTherapy Exercises https://intuitivecreativity.typepad.com/expressiveartinspirations/100-art-therapy-exercises.html ART JOURNAL HANDOUT http://artjournaling.blogspot.com/p/downloads.html
Aim:	**Gifts from nature** • Improving well-being through gaining new perspectives
Technique	The picture
Description:	Schedule a walk-in nature (in the local park, in the forest or even around the block) whenever you feel stressed, anxious or isolated. With the help of your phone, take pictures of objects in nature that can represent a gift for yourself or a friend (it can be a heart-shaped stone, a leaf with a special colour, pigeons sitting next to each other on a branch, or the sun's rays creating shadows on the asphalt) Let your imagination run wild and collect as many "gifts of nature" as possible. After completing the walk, use the Canva platform, or any other digital collage tool, and create a collage with the photos taken. Reflect on the collage and on the problem(s)challenge(s) experienced before the walk. It offers a new perspective of the situation with the help of the "gifts" collected. Answer the following questions: • How can the chosen "gifts of nature" influence my situation? (Reflect on each item separately) • What message do I receive from each individual item, related to my situation? You can also print the collage and keep it handy to be able to use the "gifts of nature" as resources whenever needed. You can do this exercise whenever you feel the need, alone or with a trusted friend. If you choose to practice the exercise together with another person, you can choose to work together on the same collage or create different collages. If you are working on different collages/different problems, share at the end the new perspective you have gained with the help of the "gifts of nature" on the identified problem/situation

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References:	For more art therapy exercises in nature, access the following link: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ef35bc51f8b3552e6bf9633/t/5f1ae00e6de2eb3c560d973e/1595596817848/Nature+Therapy+for+Everyone+-+Stephen+McCabe.pdf
	Other resources:
	The Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy Workbook https://mindfulecotherapy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Mindfulness-Based-Ecotherapy-WorkbookTOC-01.20.2016.pdf
	The Many Types of Ecotherapy – Activities, Programs, and Exampleshttps://www.ecotherapyheals.com/ecotherapy-activities/
	Creative Activities that Let Earth Teachhttps://ecoart-therapy.org

Source:PIXABAY

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

Tool title:	Seek help: Ask for help: the importance of networking
Aim:	By the end of this infographic, readers will be able to: • Recognize when they or someone else may need help • Identify different ways to ask for help for themselves or others • Assess their own need for help and take appropriate action
Technique	Infographic
Description:	Starting with brainstorming-mindful questions: **1. Define and Assess my problem** The first stage before asking for help is to define your problem. Asking yourself these questions: • Why am I feeling like that? • When am I feeling like that? • Who is responsible for those feelings? After defining it, you can assess it. • Is it a serious problem, or am I exaggerating? • Did I ever feel like this before? • Do I feel like this every day? **2. When should I seek help?** You might want to seek help if you're: • worrying more than usual • finding it hard to enjoy your life • having thoughts and feelings that are difficult to cope with, which have an impact on your day-to-day life • interested in finding more support or treatment. **3. To whom should I ask for help?** Depends on the problem and how difficult it is to solve it. There's no wrong order to try things in – different things work for different people at different times. Some options you can check on are: • Your doctor • A trained therapist • Friends and family • Organizations (helplines and listening services) • Peer support • Community support services • Workplace support **4. How to ask for help without feeling guilty or weak?** Everyone will reach the tiredness or emptiness stage, so seeking help is very common. The weather is for problems with your work, family or mental issues; asking for help from your social

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environment can be helpful and salvatory. If you feel shy to ask for help, you can ask someone you trust to help you find the appropriate help. Or you can join group therapy sessions which can help you with the feeling of guilt or shame.

Some tips:
- Be genuine and ask in your way
- Allow others to help you with ease
- Be a role model and help others
- Ask for what you need, not what you want
- Do it right now because your situation can change.
- Be honest about how much time they can give you
- Use "I" statements and be direct
- Create a new habit of asking
- Remember that you matter to the people who love you
- Change your expectations and mindset

References:	Mental wellbeing - Mind Asking for Help - Getting the Support You Need Without Looking Weak (mindtools.com) Fear of Asking for Help: 7 Mental Reasons Why It's Tough to Ask (kindlingzing.com)

Source:PIXABAY   39

Tool title:	Establish action protocols aimed at families, schools and social organizations
Aim:	By the end of this video, viewers will be able to: • Learn about protocols that can be helpful for their social community • Understand where protocols should be established • Apply protocols effectively.
Technique	Video
Description:	**1. Counselling & Psychological Services** This service is an available service working 24 hours per day (if applicable). Any person should be able to call to ask for advice and support Where: schools, universities, organizations **2. Support app** This app provides quick access to emergency resources, help, and information regarding threats, support services, suicide, and referring youngsters of concern. Where: mobile service **3. Suicide Prevention/Gatekeeper Training** A training which students from professionals will provide. The goal is for everyone can be a gatekeeper and have the basic knowledge to prevent suicide or mental breakdown. The training should be offered for free. Where: schools, universities **4. Mental Health First Aid** A course that provides instruction on how to support someone with a mental health or substance use problem and support someone with a mental health crisis. Additionally, it provides evidence-based information regarding mental health and substance use problems to help de-stigmatize these issues. The learners are certified with attendance certification. Where: schools, universities, organizations **5. Office of Health Advancement** The Office of Health Advancement aims to educate, empower, and energizes the community to thrive through a balanced lifestyle. Also, it promotes generalized well-being by educating on topics such as sexual health, nutrition, physical activity, stress management, as well as the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, which are all related to one's mental well-being. Where: schools, universities, organizations, municipalities **6. Health family strategies:**

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	• Bond with your family • Be honest with the existing problems • Adjust safe screen time protocols • Share and express opinions/thoughts • Create a safe environment.
References:	Mental Health Resources & Crisis Protocol - Suicide Prevention |Montana State University jed-hemha-postvention-guide.pdf national-guidelines-for-behavioral-health-crisis-care-02242020.pdf (samhsa.gov) 10 Essential Strategies for Family Mental Health | Psychology Today

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Source:PIXABAY

Awareness strategy

Raising awareness about mental health issues, particularly among young people, is crucial in ensuring that individuals receive the support and resources they need to maintain their well-being. To create a successful strategy for raising awareness, it's essential to engage with the social and educational world, launch social media campaigns that feature real experiences, and provide free resources for young people. It's also important to link universities with mental health services, make services accessible and appealing to young people, educate parents and teachers about mental health and online tools, and empower teenagers to raise their voices and speak for themselves.

In addition, the effects of the pandemic on young people highlight the need for measures that involve more movement, less time in the digital environment, and more face-to-face meetings. To help change the perception of the real situation, programs that support young people and give them confidence in their own strength are essential. Additionally, support groups and socialization programs can help combat isolation and improve mental health.

Various initiatives can be used to raise awareness, including videos, short films, digital storytelling, campaigns, art festivals, podcasts, and workshops. Disseminating research papers and providing information about available support services can also help. Close cooperation between services dealing with young people can help create a solid support network, capable of intercepting young people's needs early on.

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Overall, creating a successful strategy for raising awareness requires a multifaceted approach that involves engaging with the community, leveraging digital tools, providing resources and support, and empowering young people to speak out and be heard.

This Toolkit also includes tools for CSOs and specialists to raise awareness about mental health issues based on creative resources. One of these tools is the **Basics of Advocacy, which is a step-by-step guide** designed to provide practical advice and guidance on how to identify key issues, build a strong case, and engage with stakeholders to achieve a succesfull campaign.

Another tool included in this Toolkit is **Digital Creative Resources**, which is a collection of digital tools and resources that can be used to raise awareness about mental health issues among young people.

The last tool that the audience can benefit from in this Toolkit is the **Experts by Experience program**. Through it, experts can share their personal experiences with mental health challenges and the strategies that have worked for them to promote positive mental health outcomes.

Source:PEXELS

Tool title:	Basics of Advocacy: A step-by-step video for CSO professionals
Aim:	By the end of this video, viewers will be able to: • List core ideas for an impactful advocacy campaign; • Outline the main steps of an advocacy campaign; • Apply the proposed guidelines to their future advocacy initiative; • Design an awareness-raising campaign about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on youth's mental health.
Technique (creative):	Video
Description:	**Main principles for an effective advocacy campaign** **Accessible** When trying to reach a large audience, you should use different communication channels. Mass media, such as television, radio, newspapers, and social media, are good ways to reach many people. Community-based channels, such as local radio talk shows, organization newsletters, community-based activities, and meetings at schools, and workplaces, can also be very effective. It's important to remember the needs of people with disabilities, such as visual impairment, when choosing channels. **Actionable** The purpose of communication is to understand the target audience and what they know, feel, and do to help you create messages that will encourage decision-makers to take the recommended actions, hopefully resulting in change. **Credible and trusted** If people think you and your organization are credible and trustworthy, they will likely believe what you say and take your advice seriously. You can help build credibility by demonstrating competence and being open, transparent, honest, dependable, committed, and caring. The information you share must be accurate. **Relevant** When you communicate with others, it's important to consider whom you are speaking to and what their concerns might be. You can make your message more relevant by referring to personal experiences or explaining how the issue affects people in the audience's community. Policy-makers are more likely to pay attention to issues if they are seen as important to the public, or related to important values for the nation or community. **Timely** Campaigns that are timely help reach their target audiences at the times when they are most likely to make a difference. It can also be helpful to plan a sequence of messages over time to keep the energy going.

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Understandable
If you want people to take your messages seriously, make sure they can understand what you're saying. Use clear, concise language, provide materials in all languages your audience understands, tell stories with a human dimension that makes the issues feel real, and use visual elements to help make your points.

The main steps of an advocacy campaign

Step 1: Understand the topic!
Before starting to raise awareness, you should know your topic in-depth! Focus on gathering information available at a national level about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people with developing or existing mental health conditions and the long-term consequences. This will help in producing materials, data and evidence that you can use later on in the advocacy process!

Step 2: Define your objectives!
"What do you want to achieve with this initiative?" Whether detailed or more general, you should clearly define the objectives of your campaign, allowing you to precisely develop your action plan.

Step 3: Decide on and know your audience!
For whom do you want to raise awareness? To national and local government officials and policymakers? Professionals? Other CSOs? Students and the youth in general? Do you have the skills and the resources to communicate with different target groups, or will you focus on a specific target group that needs your message the most? This reflection is very important considering that your messages and tools will be determined by the audience you plan to address, given the general purpose of the campaign and the outcomes you want to achieve.

Step 4: Develop your key messages!
Different audiences need and will respond to different kinds of information, so it is important to tailor your message accordingly. Typically, advocacy communication should not only present the current situation but also provide solutions, and is characterized by:
Simplification and fact-based messaging;
Lack of unnecessary technical/advanced scientific jargon;
A limited number of messages;
Passionate compelling arguments backed up by solid facts;
Moderate use of facts and figures;
Support from influential people.

Step 5: Choose your communication methods and channels!
There are various ways to communicate your messages to others, in this advocacy process. Some of these methods may be more effective than others, depending on whom you are communicating with and what you hope to achieve:
Information stands in public locations with printed material
Workshops, webinars and round-table discussions with stakeholders
Demonstrations and petitions calling for action
Policy and recommendation papers

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Development of a series of case studies describing the situation in other European (and not only!) countries
Short leaflets and brochures
Newspaper or magazine articles, radio or television broadcasts, even podcasts!
Social media posts and lives
Eye-catching audio-visual materials

Step 6: Engage!
When engaging with your target group
be relevant – understand the context and the timing;
be knowledgeable – know your issue and audience;
be constructive – offer solutions, options, intelligence and support;
be respectful – build bridges, develop trust and value partnerships!

Step 7: Maintain the dialogue!
Follow-up meetings and events with research studies, factsheets and 'thank you' letters and emails;
Provide your contact with new research and case studies as soon as they are available;
Invite your contacts to conferences;
Proactively inform and share information and views from other stakeholders;
Offer expertise and contacts from your network;
Develop a contact list with contact details, background briefs, contact owner, and relationship history.

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References:	European Parkinson's Disease Association (n.d.). *EPDA guide toDeveloping an advocacy campaign.* https://www.parkinsonseurope.org/latest/parkinson-s-europe-toolkits/guide-to-developing-an-advocacy-campaign/ World Health Organization (2020). *Guidance on organizing an advocacy or awareness-raising campaign on lead paint.* https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240011496

Source:PIXABAY

Tool title:	Digital creative resources useful to raise awareness
Aim:	• Understand the different types of digital creative resources that can be used to raise awareness about social issues. • Learn how to effectively use writing techniques, images, audio, and video resources to convey a message and inspire action. • Recognize the impact of COVID-19 on mental health and how creative resources can help reduce stigma and promote access to resources and support.
Technique	Carousel Post
Description:	The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on both physical and mental health, particularly among young people. Raising awareness about the impact of COVID-19 on mental health and reducing stigma around mental health issues is crucial. One effective way to achieve this is by utilizing **digital creative resources**, which can convey a message in a dynamic and engaging way. By leveraging these resources, we can help to promote awareness about the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of young people, reduce stigma, and encourage access to resources and support. In this regard, there are various **types of videos** that are popular for telling social action stories: • **Vlogs**: Short for video blogs, these are simple videos in which one person speaks directly to the camera. They are typically updated regularly to provide up-to-date knowledge from the perspective of the person creating them. Vlogs are often used by political figures, quirky individuals, and people working on projects. • **Community reporting videos**: These videos involve members of a community actively participating in the gathering, recording, and sharing of news and experiences about their lives. Community reporting can provide a deeper look into society and communities, with the trust and access members have leading to more open sharing of information. • **Documentaries**: These videos capture real-time footage of events, along with interviews of people before, during, or after the fact. They may also include re-enactments of past events. • **Talking heads**: These videos center around a single person who directly addresses the camera. They are often shot as a series of interviews with multiple people providing varying perspectives on a particular issue or campaign. • **Vox pops**: These videos are similar to talking heads, but the people featured are random individuals who are approached on the street to provide their perspectives on current issues. Vox pops are useful for testing public awareness and gathering information about how the general population feels about specific topics.

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- **Parodies**: These videos take an existing piece of pop culture content and adapt it to discuss current events. By leveraging the popularity of the original work, parodies can draw attention to important issues.

Using **audio resources** is another effective way to raise awareness about the impact of COVID-19 on young people's mental health. Here are some ideas on how to use audio resources and encourage young people to prioritize their mental health.:

- **Podcasts**: Consider creating a podcast series that focuses on mental health and the impact of COVID-19 on young people. You could invite mental health experts, young people who have experienced mental health challenges, and other relevant **individuals** to share their experiences and insights. This will provide a platform for people to share their stories and increase awareness about the importance of mental health.
- **Music**: Music has the power to connect with people on an emotional level. Consider creating a playlist of songs that promote mental health awareness and encourage listeners to take care of their mental health. You could also organize a virtual concert featuring musicians who have been affected by mental health challenges or who are advocates for mental health.
- **Audio Interviews**: Conducting audio interviews with mental health experts, young people, and other individuals affected by mental health issues can be a powerful way to share experiences and raise awareness. You could post these interviews on your website or social media channels, or even air them on a local radio station.

In today's digital age, we often communicate through visual media, but some people feel that this has led to a loss of depth and complexity. However, using different **image tools** can still be a powerful way to connect with others and inspire curiosity and encourage others to act:

- **Photography**: photographs are captured moments. The right photograph can do a lot to reveal an unspoken story through direct, authentic, and bold images
- **Memes**: memes are graphics and accompanying themes that spread on the Internet through repetition and adaptation to relate common experiences. Because they carry meaning and recognition on their own, they can be a useful tool for creating an immediate connection, or a-ha moment, with your audience. They can also be a light and funny way to convey controversial topics.
- **Statement Images**: statement images allow the image poster to say something, whether sharing an individual perspective or supporting a shared statement of beliefs. Statement images are particularly effective for engaging lots of people around a common experience, and for putting real people behind an otherwise nameless, faceless issue.

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- **Infographics:** infographics help bring your facts or data to life and are great for turning difficult or complex concepts into tangible ideas.
- **Quotes**: quotes graphics can add credibility by showing a thought or idea is shared by others. They also add a human element as people relate to the thoughts, feelings, and words of either everyday people or individuals that they respect.
- **Everyday people as subject:** people love to see and share other people's inspiring or harrowing stories. One effective image tactic is taking a photo of an everyday person and telling a compelling story about them in the caption or post. Often, this type of photo relies heavily on its accompanying caption or story to inspire curiosity in the reader and distinguish it from all the other photos in your feed.
- **This or that (comparison**): images that show change are also an effective means of digital storytelling. Possible "this or that" images could be before vs. after, then vs. now, or good vs. evil.

By using various **writing techniques**, individuals and organizations can create compelling stories that engage a wide audience and encourage positive change, making it a valuable tool in promoting mental health awareness and advocacy.

- **Articles:** Articles are a powerful tool for young people to share their perspectives and opinions on important issues related to mental health. By writing articles for newspapers, magazines, or journals, young people can raise awareness about mental health issues and inspire action. Writing a blog or an article can be an opportunity to add a new angle to a story that hasn't been shared, and to amplify voices that are often left out of mainstream media.
- **Petitions:** Petitions are a way to use written words to share your social action story while encouraging direct action. Young people can create petitions to engage a lot of people around an urgent mental health issue. To create a compelling petition, you need to answer three questions: who you want to target with your petition, what you want them to do, and why it's important. The context section should include a powerful hook, an appeal to potential allies, and a clear call to action.
- **Social Media Posts:** Social media platforms like Facebook and Tumblr provide young people with an opportunity to share their stories and experiences related to mental health. Writing compelling social media posts can be an effective way to engage with a wide audience and raise awareness about mental health issues. It's important to structure posts with a beginning, middle, and end, and to keep them concise and easy to read.
- **Emails:** Emails are a common way for young people to communicate with one another and share information about the things they care about. Using email to encourage others to take action on mental health issues

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can be a powerful tool. To get your reader's attention, it's important to have a descriptive or punchy subject line. You should also include your most important content "above the fold," which is the first ten lines of your email that are visible without having to scroll down. This is where you should make your point and offer an initial call to action.

In summary, the mental health of young people has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is imperative to bring attention to this issue. Employing digital creative resources such as videos, audio resources, images, and writing techniques can be effective in conveying messages, engaging audiences, reducing stigma, and promoting access to resources and support. In fact, these techniques are essential components of a successful raising awareness campaign.

References:	Nonprofit Awareness Campaigns: The Complete Guide: https://www.onecause.com/blog/awareness-campaigns/
	Digital and Creative Communications: https://resource-media.org/
	Designing inclusive digital solutions and developing digital skills: guidelines. UNESCO 2018

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Source:PIXABAY

Tool title:	Raising awareness through empowering tools involving experts by experience
Aim:	By the end of this video, audience will be able to: • Understand importance of events to empower persons withmental health problems, especially youth people • Design an online empowering event, involving relevantstakeholders in the mental health field • Make at least one concrete step regarding how to implement warious empowerment events in the mental health field
Technique	Video
Description:	Covid 19 pandemic introduced an online environment in CSOs routines and lives, giving the opportunities to develop new forms of events with low budgets. Mental health in youth lives has been a hot topic, which increased itsimportance during Covid 19 pandemic. Listening to young people withmental health problems direct voice is one of the most powerful toolsto be used as an influence medium for other young people with mental health problems to ask for support in different forms. In this regard, empowering young people to be able to have a voice, to speak out loud, to influence others including policy makers becomesa key aspect of our lives. Online events developed using web platforms can become events that can reach many people and transfer them motivation, knowledge, and support through empowering. How? Sharing stories from people's lives, listening, andinteracting in a safe space will increase the way people relate to eachother. To produce a change in the society, personal stories shared by experts by experience (youth with mental health problems) will influence and empower other persons with similar problems to be opened to ask for support, to speak openly about individual and common needs and ask for rights. **Key aspects** **Understand the topic and the relevance** Do your field research! Know the local and national mental health environment. Mental health issues are often accompanied by social stigma and discrimination. By organizing an awareness empowerment event, CSOs can help break down these barriers, promote open discussions, and contribute to creating a more inclusive and understanding society. CSOs play a crucial role in advocating for social change and influencing policies and through online events can raise awareness about the importance of mental health and advocate for policies and resources to support those in need. **Decide your specific theme and aim** For example, you may only want to empower young people to ask

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formental health support and not to suffer in silence or you may, as an CSO to empower young people to ask policy makers to change a regulation in the field or to include a new mental health program.

Choose the stakeholders

Stakeholders are the relevant people to attend the event and to receive news post-event. Can be other young people with mental health problems, their parents/ carers, representatives of other CSOs active in mental health field or in complementary sectors, policy makers, online influencers to spread the news and make buzz aboutit, students, policy makers, representants of local and central Government etc.

Choose the relevant speakers

Maybe the most important aspect of the program. Choose wisely at least four or five people available to speak openly about their lives, how they struggle in their daily lives with mental health problems.

Train the speakers

If the speakers do not have previous experience in designing and speaking out loud about life with mental health problems, take into consideration to train them with a professional expert. They should have support to be able to: design their speech in a relevant and significant way and to deliver it properly to the online audience.

Choose the partners

Relevant partners can be associated: artists related with mental health field to give consistency and visibility, media partners to promote the event, local authorities and other CSO organizations withdifferent roles as visibility or involvement in different future mental health actions.

Establish the event agenda

Make the final agenda in a team with speakers and partners. Keep inmind the event's aim, the online environment, the participants. Involve the partners and at the end ask support from the communication team to put it in an

attractive form.

Pre-event management

- Decide the platform to host the event.
- Establish a list of participants according to your aim and invitethem. If you want a public event, advertise accordingly in social media and through media partners.
- Make sure relevant stakeholders will attend the event.
- Work with a facilitator with mental health expertise; will helpyou navigate difficult moments.
- Rehears several times.

Run the event

- Keep to the agenda.
- Support the speakers.

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- Advertise live in social media.
- ☐

Post-event management

- Advertise in social media and in various environments.
- Thank the speakers, partners and keep them involved.
- Call for action! @ relevant stakeholders!

This event online format allows organizers to do advocacy through empowering for various causes, such as decreasing stigma in communities online and offline, to ask for different forms of support or just to ask to be included as a strong voice in making decisions about themselves.

| References: | https://professional.dce.harvard.edu/blog/10-tips-for-improving-your- public-speaking-skills/ https://www.talkspace.com/blog/mental-health-awareness-how-you-can-help/ |

Source:PIXABAY

Recommendations and guidelines

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the mental health of young people, with increased levels of anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems being reported across the world. As a result, there is a growing need for recommendations and guidelines to help families, schools, and carers take care of young people, as well as for policy makers to implement measures that support the mental health of young people.

To address this need, a chapter has been developed that offers recommendations and guidelines based on the answers of relevant stakeholders during focus groups and informal discussions about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth mental health. These stakeholders included young people, parents, teachers, mental health professionals, and policymakers, among others.

The **recommendations and guidelines** are divided into two main levels. The first perspective is *practical in nature* and addresses families, schools, and carers. The aim of this perspective is to provide practical advice and support to those who are responsible for the care of young people. The second perspective is *political and economic in nature* and is aimed at policymakers. The recommendations and guidelines in this perspective aim to inform policy decisions that can support the mental health of young people during and after the pandemic. Each level is presented per partner country encouraging the readers to take into account the contextual and cultural factors present in each country when examining the recommendations made by the professionals. Overall, these recommendations and guidelines are designed to provide a comprehensive and evidence-based approach to supporting the mental health of young people in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Source:PIXABAY

Practical suggestions for caregivers of youth with existing or arising mental health challenges

(From Romania)

o To take care of young people who are not going through a good moment of mental health, they should be guided to read motivational and personal development books or to listen to music to relax, to be taught how to set realistic goals and structure the steps to achieve them.

o Teach young people how to ask for help when they need it and how to approach psychologists, educators, or colleagues.

o Talk to families who take care of these children on a daily basis to inform them how to approach them and how to give them the confidence that they can open up.

o Provide guidance to parents, who can turn to family doctors, teachers, school psychologists, and counselors for help when young people have problems finding balance.

o Constantly observe and involve young people in activities they enjoy to prevent self-mutilation and distract them.

o Support young people through individual discussions, try to listen with their ears, see with their eyes, and position ourselves in their situation.

o Help young people have confidence in their own strength by trying to understand them and bend to their needs.

o Encourage communication by stimulating socialization and integration, organizing outings in the community, and teaching young people how to express their problems and with whom it is advisable to do this.

o Be calm, speak to them nicely, welcome them into their group, not marginalize them, help them integrate into the community, listen to them, understand them, and provide comfort.

o Allocate time to communicate with them day by day, offering logical explanations to children, and encouraging psychoeducational activities.

o Organize community outings to help young people rediscover the joy of nature.

o Raise awareness of the problems that young people face through awareness campaigns.

o Encourage and implement volunteering.

o Understand the child's situation before talking about any solution or problem.

(From Cyprus)

o Track gratitude and achievement with a journal.

o Set up a getaway.

o Work your strengths.

o Work some omega-3 fatty acids into your diet.

o Practice forgiveness.

o Take 30 minutes to go for a walk in nature.

o Spend time with family and friends.

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(From Spain)

- To establish prevention strategies, offering mothers and fathers information about parenting and positive parenting in crisis situations, promoting appropriate health habits and providing them with tools to help them manage their children's emotions.
- Educate in healthy habits. It is key to enable spaces for dialogue with them in order to understand what they are feeling and experiencing. Let's put our energy into accompanying them, listening to them, sincerely empathizing with them, and thus being able to build healthy habits and behaviors in the context of a pandemic.
- Positive communication.

(From Greece)

- Team sports.
- Reduction of screen time/social media time.
- Balanced diet.
- Physical exercise/ Stretching /Dancing.
- Yoga/Meditation.
- Stable routines/rituals.
- Daily planning.
- Reading.
- Spending time in nature.
- Social interactions with friends.
- Human connection and contact/meaningful relationships.
- Regular assistance, not necessarily to resolve a crisis / Use of mental health centres.
- Self-help.
- Experiencing and expressing emotions/thoughts.
- For caregivers: emotional availability, acceptance without judgement, trust, respect for their boundaries.

Source: ARTY project   55

(From Italy)

- Getting to know each other: Who am I? How do I look? What do I like? What do I dislike? What makes me feel good and what does not?
- Creating relationships - at school, online, with peers, with adults, with professionals. Trying to create bonds is essential in order to share emotions, experiences, doubts, fears, hopes.
- Putting yourself out there - engaging in face-to-face or online activities that challenge the person is a great opportunity to engage with others and learn new things. This could be a drama course, a multiplayer video game or a social network on which to share one's artistic work...
- Ask for help - look for a reference adult, who could be a parent, a teacher, the school psychologist: someone you can talk to about your discomforts. There are also online platforms or apps that allow you to receive support online.
- Getting to know the teenager: what are his/her interests? What are his/her fears? How is he/she? Why does he/she behave that way? What does he/she not like?

- o Find out about group activities available in the area that might motivate the teenager's participation - such as theatre, dance, music, art...
- o Find out about the teenager's mind, adolescence, the effects of the pandemic on a social, relational, emotional and cognitive level.
- o Seek external help and support (school, parents, professionals) both in presence and/or online.
- o Ultimately... get involved as a parent and as a person!

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Source:PEXELS

Key recommendations for policy makers in addressing mental health challenges

(From Romania)

- Establishing clubs at the local level for young people and creating programs that support continuity for them.
- Improving health services, including free counseling sessions and psychotherapy, and promoting information campaigns about mental health.
- Municipalities and local councils should be involved in school and community programs to integrate young people into society.
- Changing legislation to include mandatory training courses for parents who submit their children's disability files or for parents in general to take care of their children.
- Support programs should be implemented to help young people and to make the population realize that they represent a resource.
- Political decision-makers should listen to the opinion of young people before creating programs and campaigns.
- Creating new programs that appeal to young people for spending their free time, such as cinema, dance hall, painting, and gyms, and providing free transport to other cities that have more social services.
- Establishing youth motivation programs to provide gains like trips or monetary gains, which can be used by a young person to finance their hobbies or career.
- Creating centers that can be accessed through the Insurance House and programs that make it easier for young people to integrate into the labor market and get a home after leaving placement centers.
- Supplementing staff to comply with the number of children, training professionals to work with target groups, and raising awareness through campaigns and workshops.
- Political decision-makers must be more open, more attentive, and not forget children in the centers.

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(From Cyprus)

- Government's website for supporting young people with different kind of services.
- Public bodies organise events free of charge.
- Schools to have lessons or lectures for the benefits of art therapy.
- Focus group with artists and young people.
- Open discussions.
- Open events to young people who want to promote their artistic work.
- TV shows which inform the public about mental issues.
- Seminars, campaigns.
- Each young person has a free appointment with a psychologist. (or discount).

(From Spain)

- A national strategy at the highest level for the specific fight against social inequalities in health as "the most important lesson to be drawn from the pandemic.
- Strengthening and renewing public health (especially services such as primary care and mental health).
- Preserving the rights of girls and boys, their mental health and their integral development, without putting the health of the community at risk, is a social challenge that the competent authorities in health matters must face.
- The urgent need to invest in mental health given the risk of a massive increase in emotional problems in young people in the coming months due to the impact of the pandemic.

Source:PEXELS

(From Greece)

- Increasing the number of public support services outside urban centres.
- Hybrid model (offline/online counselling).
- Reducing the waiting list in public mental health centres by recruiting mental health professionals in permanent positions.
- Reducing turn-overs and staff instability.
- Reducing bureaucracy in the public mental health system.
- Service mapping available on Municipalities' webpages.
- Paid leave of absence to mental health professionals for educational purposes.
- Permanent school/educational psychologists in all public schools.
- Raised and regular research endeavours on mental health in Universities and Mental Health Centres.
- Transparency and independent control mechanisms in the management of funds allocated to mental health.
- Beneficiaries' capability to choose the professional they want to work with in public mental health services.
- Ensuring safe and private spaces for sessions in public mental health services.
- Extension of working hours to cover everyone's needs.
- Online chat option linked to the service's website.
- Integration of mental health lessons/projects in the formal educational system.
- Free-of-charge group therapies coordinated by the Municipalities.
- Regular, transparent and supported relationship between the PTA and the educators.
- Specialised in specific mental difficulties in mental health units.
- Strengthening the social services of public hospitals.
- Deinstitutionalisation and strengthening of semi-autonomous living houses.
- Websites with new psychologists who would provide services at a low cost.

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(From Italy)

- o Recognising and not underestimating the phenomenon of pandemic adolescents.
- o Act systematically and not in spots.
- o Provide quality services and/or make easily accessible parenting support services, accompanying psychological interventions for adults experiencing difficulties in their parental role for a variety of reasons.
- o Strengthening the school psychology service, aimed not only at students but also at teachers as a moment of supervision.
- o Make the figure of the basic psychologist more accessible, instead of the doctor.
- o Improve communication between professionals from the third sector, school, family, public services with a standard action plan.
- o Give more political/social/economic recognition to third sector professionals, particularly educators, by providing them with training, supervision, psychological support.
- o Investing in youth centres, improving access to socialising contexts for young people.

Source: ARTY project

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Source:PIXABAY

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- ARTY project focus groups and informal discussions

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Further readings

Annex 1.- Findings and results derived from informal discussions and focus groups

Mental health status in young people

Source:PIXABAY

Source: ARTY project

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Social issues

Source:PIXABAY

"I believe that the pandemic has affected the of desire of young people to get involved in activities, acquiring a lot of fears and anxiety about the future."

"Warning signs that families and carers should look out for in young people to prevent their mental deterioration may be refusal to engage in activities, refusal to engage in social activities and accepting advice, aggressive language and inappropriate behaviors"

"Young people should be supported, taught about the methods of choosing real news, improving their critical thinking and guiding them to avoid the negative parts of the Internet "

Questions:

→ Have you noticed an increase in youth affected by the COVID pandemic? About what percentage?

→ How has the pandemic affected the mood and mental health of youth?

→ What are the warning signs that families and caregivers should take into consideration with young people to care for and prevent their mental health?

→ How can mobility restrictions affect youth in their future development?

→ How can technology be good and enemy for youth?

Findings

- Around 20% of young people were affected by the COVID pandemic

- Regarding the identified social problems, the following were mentioned: low desire to interact with those around and the decrease of involvement/desire to access the labor market.

- The mentioned warning signs refer to the identified social problems. Parents, teachers, psychologists, counselors should pay attention to the social problems mentioned above.

- Mobility restrictions have already left their mark on young people, making them fear the future and their own health, and leaving them with socialization problems.

- The answers regarding the benefits and negative aspects of technology regarding young people are related to how young people are or are not able to discern between these aspects. It is necessary for them to be taught how to protect themselves in the online environment and how to access digital technologies for their own benefit.

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"Pandemic isolation has had a huge impact on young people, both socially and emotionally."

"Young people were away of friends and social activities to which they are accustomed, which led to feelings of loneliness and isolation. In addition, many young people have been affected by anxiety and depression as a result of the isolation and stress created by the pandemic. On the other hand, the isolation of the pandemic has also provided good points for young people to develop other skills and hobbies, focus more on families and spend time with their families."

"They discovered Zoom and online tools to partially supplement their face-to-face interaction."

Findings

- The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on young people, especially on youth mental health. Many young people have lost education and employment opportunities due to the closure of schools, universities and the global economy. Young people who had finished their education and were looking for a job during this time faced major difficulties in finding a suitable job, and those who were already working were often dismissed or sent on technical unemployment. These let to major mental health troubles.

- The pandemic also adversely affected the mental health of many young people, who were isolated and restricted in their social and recreational activities. In addition, the absence of social interactions and the loss of important events were stressful factors for many young people.

- However, the pandemic has also had positive effects on young people, such as adopting a healthier lifestyle, improving relationships with family and friends and developing coping skills.

- Majority of respondents notices increases of mental health problems at young people but in Romania, only in urban aria people recognize signs and go to a specialist. Still, people focused of solving other safety matters and let mental health behind- majority considered.

(Romania)

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Source:PIXABAY-

Source:PIXABAY

"Youth are reporting more anxiety, feelings of isolation, loneliness and many also report difficulty in engaging in intimate relationships and/or friendships."

"Missing their social interactions is even more difficult for youth tHan the other age groups due to the Paramount importance that the social aspect gains during youth ages"

Questions:

→ Have you noticed an increase in youth affected by the COVID pandemic? About what percentage?

→ How has the pandemic affected the mood and mental health of youth?

→ How can mobility restrictions affect youth in their future development?

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Findings

- The mental health professionals could not say a specific percentage but they commented that during and after the covid period Covid the number of self-reports of youth have risen based on the subjective experience of health professionals such as psychologists and psychotherapists.

- Youth are reporting more anxiety, feelings of isolation, loneliness and many also report difficulty in engaging in intimate relationships and/or friendships. There is also a general lack of motivation towards the future.

- Professionals explained that the mobility restrictions can affect the future development of the youth in many ways. First of all, they don't have social interactions due to the Paramount importance that the social aspect gains during youth ages. Limiting this can have multiple effects in youth. In addition, minimized social interaction or mingling strips them of opportunities to create new relationships which are pivotal in their development, also in opportunities to discover themselves and create their social identity.

- Moreover, the lack of connectedness or of the feeling of belonging have also been reported, which is a basic human need and again, heightened in youth

(Cyprus)

"The impact of COVID-19 has been the result of previous inequalities and, at the same time, has perpetuated and increased them."

"Pandemic has left an emotional, deep and socially unequal scar."

"Let's remember that, for the adolescent, the most important thing is still being with their peers"

"Let's try to empathize with that and let's not minimize his need to meet his friends."

Questions:

→ In what social aspects would you say that the pandemic has affected structurally in relation to young people?

→ How has the covid affected the social relationships of young people?

Findings

- The confinement exposed a reality of homes without a computer, broadband internet connection or alternatives to the school canteen: only 5.7% of the students benefited from aid or alternative food measures to this during said period.

- Limited transforming scope of basic education policies when it comes to tackling structural inequalities

- The pandemic deprived young people of the daily experience of being with their friends. It must be said that young people experience social relationships differently from adults. They need to be with their peers and socialize more than at any other stage of life. With their friends they feel understood, they empathize, because they are experiencing the same thing

(Spain)

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Source:PEXELS

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

"Young people move between the two poles of the same continuum:

- on the one hand, they have an increased need for socialization;
- on the other, they are afraid of encounters."

Questions:

→ Have you noticed an increase in youth affected by the COVID pandemic? About what percentage?

→ How has the pandemic affected the mood and mental health of youth?

→ How can mobility restrictions affect youth in their future development?

Findings

- Mental health professionals reported that the pandemic (and lockdowns) has affected the social behavior of the youth in the following ways. For example:

  - Alienation and loneliness

  - Fights with parents/siblings and partners

  - Increase of the reported domestic violence cases

  - Increase in aggressiveness and delinquency

  - Numbness in social relations

  - Agoraphobia and avoidance of indoor spaces

  - Struggles in human connection

  - Internalization of restrictions and social distancing/isolation even after lockdowns

  - The internet as a shield for social interactions

- Many supported that the above consequences will work as an obstacle to their social development and their social skills in the future. The social anxiety, the fear of connections and the isolation may lead to a loss of enjoyment of being with people, with introverts being at higher risk

(Greece)

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Source:PIXABAY

"I perceive a big gap between inside and outside home. I call it 'being locked in the box'. Protective factors such as school, educators, community centers, friends have disappeared while risk factors have increased, as in the case of young people living in families with fragility, the latter have been greatly affected by the pandemic because they have been forced to live in a dysfunctional family environment without being able to draw on external resources that mediate the impact of the family system on their mental health."

Questions:

→ What has been the impact of COVID-19 on youth mental health?

Findings

- All participants said that covid had a significant impact on the mental health of young people.

- The impact of the pandemic on young people is tightly connected with of the perceived lack of certainty about the future, for this reason adolescents live by the day, living in the present.

- At the relational level, they have not had the opportunity to develop the necessary skills to relate to others and they struggle to deal with problems. If before the pandemic, young people preferred the large group now they prefer small groups of friends and struggle more and relate to strangers and meet new people. The adult is no longer seen as a guide but as someone whose job it is to reprimand and with whom they come into conflict. At school adolescents struggle to work in groups everyone tends to do their own part without really cooperating with others. In addition, distance education has widened the social divide and the gap between teens: those who had the economic and socio-cultural resources were able to continue their education those who did not have such resources fell behind and now have significant gaps. The school went on focusing mainly on content and leaving out the psychological and moral difficulties of the youth. This had major psychological implications on them.

(Italy)

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Source: PIXABAY

Mental health status in young people

Source:PIXABAY

Source: ARTY project

Cognitive impacts

Source: PIXABAY

"We identified young people who were affected by the pandemic. I have been working in the child protection system for 18 years and I have noticed a change.

They are more aggressive verbally; they no longer have patience with each other or with the educators.

They no longer have patience even at work and because of these conflicts arise. They are more nervous. I have noticed these changes in 75% of the young people I work with"

Questions:

→ Have you noticed an increase in youth affected by the COVID pandemic? About what percentage?

→ How has the pandemic affected the mood and mental health of youth?

→ What are the warning signs that families and caregivers should take into consideration with Young people to care for and prevent their mental health?

→ How can mobility restrictions affect youth in their future development?

→ How can technology be good and enemy for youth?

Findings

- Around 75% of young people were affected by the COVID pandemic

- Regarding the cognitive effects that the pandemic had on these young people, they improved during the pandemic, considering that teachers and educators spent more time with students in family-type homes. They had more support from the teachers and managed to learn constantly, without losing the didactic activities.

- The warning signs that have been mentioned are related to digital technology addiction problems. During the pandemic, young people tended to spend more time online and thus a dependency on certain technologies was created.

- The mobility restrictions have already left their mark on the young people in a beneficial way, they can learn better and more, given that the teachers from the center spent more time with them.

- The answers regarding the benefits and negative aspects of technology regarding young people are related to the addiction that the use of the online environment can give. A benefit was that the young people kept in touch with friends from abroad and the negative parts are related to addiction to movies and social networks

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Findings

- Several findings (in terms of cognitive impacts) were listed as noticed at youth, during the pandemic:

- Decreased attention and concentration - Social isolation led to a decrease in social stimulation and make it harder for people to concentrate on their tasks. Memory impairment - Lack of social stimulation disturbed memory and led to learning and memory difficulties. Decreased decision-making ability - Social isolation led to a decreased ability to make decisions and analyses complex situations. Decreased problem-solving ability - Lack of social interaction led to decreased ability to find solutions to complex problems. Depression and anxiety - Social isolation can led to increased risk of depression and anxiety, which might affect cognitive functioning.

(Romania)

Source:PIXABAY

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Source:PIXABAY

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Questions:

→ How has the pandemic affected the mood and mental health of youth?

→ How can mobility restrictions affect youth in their future development?

Findings

- Mental health professionals reported that the pandemic (and lockdowns) has affected the youth in the following cognitive ways:

  - Radicalization and polarization

  - Cognitive disruption

  - Distorted sense of time

  - Difficulty/refusal to process what happened

  - Reduced creativity

  (Greece)

"The gap between student needs and school readiness points to the importance of more comprehensive support for both schools and students."

"The footprint of the pandemic is leaving consequences depending on their abilities: if children and adolescents had difficulties before, the pandemic probably made them worse"

"As teachers, as parents and as a society, we have the obligation and responsibility to counteract the deficiencies derived from the pandemic in cognitive, social and psychomotor matters"

Questions:

→ What are the most worrisome cognitive aspects derived from the pandemic?

→ What will be the impact of the pandemic on children/teenager's development in the long term?

Findings

- Adolescents reveal that their biggest concerns about the school year are "falling behind" academically, having lost the ability to concentrate on studies, and experiencing anxiety in social settings or public spaces.

- There is a very high peak of language problems, and it is very important as parents to act in time before this delay in development.

- The situation becomes more worrying if we add the use of screens, which has been shown to make people less empathetic to the same effect associated with the use of masks.

(Spain)

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Source:PEXELS

Source:PIXABAY

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"The most difficult thing was to explain the situation to the youth with cognitive disabilities, to find a way of explaining the reason for this emergency but without frightening them. Their routines were altered and, in some cases, we saw an increase in problematic behaviours."

Questions:

→ Have you noticed an increase in youth affected by the COVID pandemic? About what percentage?

→ How has the pandemic affected the mood and mental health of youth?

→ How can mobility restrictions affect youth in their future development?

Findings

- Professionals who deal with youth with cognitive disabilities have found it difficult to explain the covid-19 emergency situation to their users without frightening them. The pandemic has altered the routines of young people with cognitive disabilities and this has led to an increase in the manifestation of problem behaviours.

(Italy)

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

Source:PIXABAY

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Questions:

→ How can mobility restrictions affect youth in their future development

Findings

- According to the psychologists, young people may not be exposed to social interaction and lose opportunities to travel, attend education and gain different life skills. It may be a challenge for young people to adjust and cultivate the skills they need through online learning minimizing mobility

(Cyprus).

Mental health status in young people

Source:PIXABAY

Source: ARTY project

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Emotional aspects

Source:PIXABAY

"Technology helps the beneficiaries I take care of; they use social networks very often. They have found an attractive way to communicate through free messaging with the help of voice messages. Unfortunately, virtual autism can set in and it can decrease the performance of young people in other activities including personal hygiene, chronic fatigue or even from an ophthalmological point of view. This is where the conflicts with adults come from"

Questions:

→ Have you noticed an increase in youth affected by the COVID pandemic? About what percentage?

→ How has the pandemic affected the mood and mental health of youth?

→ What are the warning signs that families and caregivers should take into consideration with young people to care for and prevent their mental health?

→ How can mobility restrictions affect youth in their future development?

→ How can technology be good and enemy for youth?

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Findings

- Changes in young people's behavior were identified during the pandemic, but they disappeared for most people after the state of emergency was lifted. In this center, during the period 2021-2022, a total of 4 reintegration into the community out of a total of 26 people were carried out.

- The warning signs that have been mentioned are short-term tantrums, crying, yelling, low frustration tolerance.

- Mobility restrictions caused insomnia, excessive sleeping, lack of appetite or excessive eating

- Regarding the benefits and positive aspects of technology, the following were mentioned: positive aspects - better communication with friends when face-to-face meetings are not possible, as was the case during the pandemic; The negative aspects - virtual autism.

"With nothing to do back home, many teenagers have turned to screens/videogames/smartphones to pass the time. Increased screen time directly let to effects on mental health, including anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances."

Findings

- Most respondents stated that all youth interacted during and post pandemic faces strong emotional aspects. They were afraid to interact, to touch other persons, to stay connected face to face. Other emotional aspects appeared as side effects of staying too much online connected during lockdown, sometimes even up to 20 hours/ day because there were no other activities to be involved in. Teenagers have shown signs of depression and anxiety. In Romania, many hospitals were closed and transformed in Covid hospitals and there were restrictions related to mental health services opened for population. Lockdowns had limited opportunities for teenagers to socialize with their peers in person, leading to increased feelings of isolation and loneliness. Also respondents stated that the closure of schools and extracurricular activities has disrupted the daily routines of teenagers.

(Romania)

77

Source:PIXABAY-

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

"The violation of their rights and their living conditions led to the acquisition of anxiety disorders, panic attacks and resignation syndromes"

"They stole their youth, their carefree spirit!"

(Greece)

Questions:

→ Have you noticed an increase in youth affected by the COVID pandemic? About what percentage?

→ How has the pandemic affected the mood and mental health of youth?

→ How can mobility restrictions affect youth in their future development?

Findings

- Many mental health professionals claimed that indeed they had noticed an increase in mental health cases but they could not figure out whether the mental health issues were higher during the pandemic or whether the youth was more familiar with mental health services and confident to use them. Additionally, some claimed that the pandemic per se did not create mental health challenges, but exaggerated or brought to the surface pre-existing conditions. The conditions/symptoms they observed were the following, outlining a picture of emotional disruption:

    - Increased restlessness and irritation even for the simplest things

    - Increased anxiety/stress responses

    - Increased panic attacks with no previous history

    - Mood disorders, such as depression

    - Sleep/Eating disorders

    - Hypochondriasis and obsessive-compulsive behaviours in relation to cleaning

    - Increased phobias – creations of new phobias (e.g., health and vulnerability fear)

    - Guild and fear of spreading the virus with their lifestyles

    - Constant fear as a result of state controls and restrictions ("Being afraid became something like a habit.")

    - Anger outbursts

    - Feelings of helplessness and pessimism

    - Discomfort due to lack of socialization

    - Psychosomatic/skin issues

    - Mourn for the lost years and opportunities

    - Increased relapses in people with existing psychoses/mood disorders

    - Repulsion of what happened

78

Source:PIXABAY-

> *"It is recommended that adults in charge of minors make an effort to set an example and also express their own emotions, not limiting communication to the practical aspects of the disease, and that they request psychological help if needed."*
>
> *"For proper development in childhood and adolescence, routines and healthy lifestyle habits are necessary."*

Questions:

→ What were the psychological repercussions of COVID-19 on Spanish youth?

→ Have you noticed an increase in youth affected by the COVID pandemic? About what percentage?

→ How has the pandemic affected the mood and mental health of youth?

Findings

• 32% of youth were psychologically affected during confinement

• The pandemic significantly intensified the trend of worsening mood in the adolescent population and widened the gender gap. The boys went from 18% (pre-pandemic) to 26% (during the pandemic), with negative mood, while the girls varied from 33% to 53%.

• It supposes the separation of friends and loved ones, loss of freedom and uncertainty due to the effect of the disease itself in the future. It generates anger, stress, anger and can even increase the chances of suicide. (Spain)

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

Source:PIXABAY

"In the peer groups, I observed a marked difficulty in looking at each other's faces, in particular between boys and girls and also a fair amount of anger."
"During the lock down, some adolescents showed feelings of anxiety and frustration, while others were better off during this period probably because there was less social pressure. For the latter, the greatest discomfort emerged after reopening and returning to class, developing feelings of anxiety and a sense of inadequacy."

Questions:

→ What has been the impact of COVID-19 on youth mental health?

Findings

- As a result of the pandemic, youth are either annihilated, taking refuge in parallel worlds with video games, telephones and social networks or have become bombs of unexpressed emotions. Many professionals have found an increase in anger in young people.

- The covid-19 emergency promoted prejudices and a completely generalized narrative about young people: "Young people get sick and then pass the virus on to the elderly"; "Young people sneak out". This led adolescents to develop a growing sense of guilt and fear of leaving home and meeting with peers. Covid-19 emergency has affected the youth by accentuating and worsening the phenomenon of social withdrawal. Some users were worse when the restrictions were removed as if the restrictions legitimized their avoidance mechanisms.

- Some professionals have noticed that as a result of the pandemic, youth are more tired and agitated, clumsy on a motor and relational level and withdrawn into themselves. Some youth developed an intense fear of death and recurrent negative thoughts. Some youth manifested significant emotional flattening and abulia.

- In mental health centers there has been an increase in adolescent users who seem to be looking for someone to lean on who can deeply understand their emotional distress.

- For some youth, the mask has been a protective barrier to cover their faces and not expose themselves to the judgments of others, so much so that when it was eliminated some found it difficult to stop using it for fear of being seen with their faces uncovered.

(Italy)

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Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

"I am currently working with children and young people and noticed that pandemic has affected families in multiple ways.".

"Therefore, isolation resulted in low mood, increased aggression and anxiety."

"The pandemic has affected the job market since unemployment has increased and many students due to the circumstance had quit their studies."

Questions:
→ Have you noticed an increase in youth affected by the COVID pandemic? About what percentage?
→ How has the pandemic affected the mood and mental health of youth?
→ How can mobility restrictions affect youth in their future development?

Findings

- Children became more familiar with illness and death and parents had to face different challenges explaining to children the current situation. In addition to that, all processes became online and young people had to adjust to new circumstances I.e., online learning and gain new digital skills. This result is not very negative if you consider that in 2 months everyone was obliged to learn how to use digital tools for his/her work and education. Tools like Zoom, MS Team, Google meet had played a huge role during those months to help people continue their life and move their life in a laptop/tablet/phone.

- Pandemic caused isolation and multiple changes in our everyday life and interactions. When restrictions were at their zenith and the majority of kids weren't really in school, educators noticed a notable increase in parent-reported behavioral and attentional challenges related to SDQ between March 2020 and March 2021. These symptoms worsened during the initial national lockdown (March–June 2020), decreased and stabilized as restrictions loosened, worsened once more starting in January 2021 when a new national lockdown was implemented, and then decreased once more when most kids started going back to school in March 2021. Average adolescent self-reported SDQ symptoms across all examined domains (behavioral, attentional, and emotional), as well as parent-reported emotional symptoms, were largely stable over time; however, the peak levels of both parent- and adolescent-reported symptoms occurred when there were severe restrictions in place and most children's access to schools was prohibited.

- Warning signs could be changes in young people's behavior and mood I.e., behavioral difficulties, anger, low school attendance and motivation, poor involvement with peers and tendency to risky behaviors. Any persistent and noticeable behavioral change should be taken seriously and explore the individual circumstances and triggers.

(Cyprus)

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Mental health status in young people

Source:PIXABAY

Source: ARTY project

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Challenges detected

Source:PIXABAY

""In general, we found that with the development of technology, more and more children and young people have access to phones, and thus immerse themselves in the online environment, thus breaking away from reality. Unfortunately, many no longer know how to socialize, they become less empathetic and have more frustrations. Becoming dependent on the online environment, they end up procrastinating many of the duties they have."

Questions:

→ Have you noticed an increase in youth affected by the COVID pandemic? About what percentage?

→ How has the pandemic affected the mood and mental health of youth?

→ What are the warning signs that families and caregivers should take into consideration with young people to care for and prevent their mental health?

→ How can mobility restrictions affect youth in their future development?

→ How can technology be good and enemy for youth?

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Findings

- No increase in the number of young people affected by the Covid 19 pandemic was identified

- The warning signs that families and caregivers should take into account are related to the changes in behavior that young people have. Children tend to become more aggressive and young people more withdrawn/uncommunicative, both situations being caused by the lack of skills in expressing emotions.

- Mobility restrictions have caused dependence on technology

- Regarding the benefits and positive aspects of technology, the following were mentioned: positive aspects - the opportunity to learn online and keep up with teaching activities. The pandemic has offered young people several digital resources that they did not know about, and which are of real help; The negative aspects - dependence on technology

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"I heard about a (psychiatric) hospital where teenagers stayed on the floor, because all the beds were occupied during pandemic."

Findings

- How to address mental health problems and struggles, in online environment, with limited financial possibilities.
- How to address depression/ anxiety
- How to enter into new routines/ how to mentain routines
- How to address isolation and loneliness
- How not to stay too much into online and gadgets
- How to control irrational believes related to virus
- How to stay connected to human beings

(Romania)

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Source:PIXABAY-

Questions:

→ Have you noticed an increase in youth affected by the COVID pandemic? About what percentage?

→ How has the pandemic affected the mood and mental health of youth?

→ What are the warning signs that families and caregivers should take into consideration with young people to care for and prevent their mental health?

Findings

- Lack of concentration in studies which led to reduced school performance

- Interoperability of studies/work

- Difficulties in returning to offline normality

- Difficulties in adapting oneself to new and constantly changing conditions

- Professional inertia and inhibition of progress

- Low-quality education during the lockdowns

- Increase in substance abuse

85

- Increase in gaming/screen addiction

- Lack of trust in the government - Resistance to authorities - Anger against the system

- The participants gave a list of warning signs that should alarm families and caregivers that the young person may have started to struggle with his/her mental state:
  - Changes in habits and routines (e.g., activities, food, sleep schedule)
  - Changes in school performance
  - Changes in self-care
  - Changes in life plans
  - Changes in how (s)he communicates his/her feelings
  - Hypersensitivity and anger outbursts
  - Social withdrawal and isolation
  - Anxieties and phobias that did not exist before
  - Panic attacks
  - Anhedonia
  - Eating disorders and/or weight fluctuation
  - Dermatological and auto-immune issues
  - Gastrointestinal disturbances

(Greece)

Source:PIXABAY

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"The school has become more and more distant from the families and they are struggling. In fact, we have had a boom in requests to be taken in by the services."

Questions:

→ What has been the impact of COVID-19 on youth mental health?

Findings

- With the pandemic, risk factors have greatly increased and protective factors have decreased, adolescents have been forced to stay indoors, and because of this, adolescents with family fragilities have been particularly affected.

- Vandalism committed by groups of teenagers and group fights have increased in the recent period, such incidents could be dysfunctional manifestations of unexpressed and accumulated anger following the period of restrictions and strict rules.

- In addition, professionals have found increased dependence on social networks, adolescents get nervous when they are without their phones

(Italy)

"The stigmatization of young people in the coronavirus is a very dangerous breeding ground."

"The role of new technologies in eating disorders is a clear aggravating factor. Exposure of hyper-thin bodies, viral challenges, you have to be very attentive to the symptoms to make a premature detection of possible problems."

"We cannot afford to be late again for a mental health pandemic"

Questions:

→ What do you consider the most striking challenges in terms of youth mental health derived from the pandemic?

→ How can technology be good and enemy for youth?

Findings

- An effect frequently associated with the use of new technologies is the alteration of sleep patterns.

- In the COVID-19 pandemic, an increase in calls to child helplines and calls to the police for incidents of intrafamily violence has been detected

- The scientific evidence on the relationship between greater use of social networks and lower self-esteem has been extensive for years and the pandemic has caused many young people to make brutal use of the networks

- Cases affected by technology include self-harm, eating disorders, suicidal ideation and attempts, and other psychological problems. The involvement of technology is greater in the months of strict confinement.

- Online psychotherapy.

(Spain)

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Source: PIXABAY

Annex 2.- Quick access to digital tools and resources

Tool title:	Warning signs of emotional distress in youth
Objectives	By the end of this infographic, readers will be able to: • Recognize the most common signs that indicate emotional distress in youth; • Give original examples of signs based on their experience with young people; • Discuss the most common signs of emotional distress with their colleagues and other stakeholders.
Technique	Infographic
Link	https://artyproject.eu/

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Tool title:	Selection of art-therapeutic/creative resources useful for the adolescent group
Objectives	At the end of this presentation, the learner will be able to: • Know the main digital art resources and techniques to use with adolescents online or face-to-face; • Select digital resources, such as apps and programmes, to implement individual/group art activities addressed to adolescents; • Organise digital art activities to be carried out in presence, online or in a hybrid form to positively impact on adolescents' well-being and mental health
Technique	Infographic
Link	https://artyproject.eu/

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Tool title:	Tips against stress, anxiety and isolation
Objectives	• Combating anxiety and isolation through discovering one's own qualities, improving self-esteem and self-confidence, identifying resources • To achieve relaxation to reduce stress and anxiety • Improving well-being through gaining new perspectives
Technique	Video
Link	https://artyproject.eu/

90

Tool title:	Seek help: Ask for help: the importance of networking
Objectives	• Recognize when they or someone else may need help • Identify different ways to ask for help for themselves or others • Assess their own need for help and take appropriate action
Technique	Infographic
Link	https://artyproject.eu/

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91

Tool title:	Establish action protocols aimed at families, schools and social organizations
Objectives	• Learn about protocols that can be helpful for their social community • Understand where protocols should be established • Apply protocols effectively.
Technique	Video
Link	https://artyproject.eu/

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Tool title:	Basics of Advocacy: A step-by-step video for CSO professionals
Objectives	• List core ideas for an impactful advocacy campaign; • Outline the main steps of an advocacy campaign; • Apply the proposed guidelines to their future advocacy initiative; • Design an awareness-raising campaign about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on youth's mental health.
Technique	Video
Link	https://artyproject.eu/

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Tool title:	Digital creative resources useful to raise awareness
Objectives	• Understand the different types of digital creative resources that can be used to raise awareness about social issues. • Learn how to effectively use writing techniques, images, audio, and video resources to convey a message and inspire action. • Recognize the impact of COVID-19 on mental health and how creative resources can help reduce stigma and promote access to resources and support.
Technique	Carousel Post
Link	https://artyproject.eu/

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Tool title:	Raising awareness through empowering tools involving experts by experience
Objectives	Understand importance of events to empower persons withmental health problems, especially youth people • Design an online empowering event, involving relevantstakeholders in the mental health field • Make at least one concrete step regarding how to implement warious empowerment events in the mental health field
Technique	Video
Link	https://artyproject.eu/

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