

# Youth Steps Against Power Abuse

AGREEMENT N°: 2019-1-PL01-KA205-062772

## Coronavirus and Youth. How the epidemic impacts young people across the EU

The problem of violence and various types of abuse of power is more and more visible and present in the European society, in particular in the context of the citizens most exposed to it and often least protected from it: young people. In the context of COVID-2019 outbreak, consultation between NGOs from Poland, Romania, Spain, Portugal and Estonia in implementation of the project “Youth against power abuse” funded by Erasmus+ programme have shown the uniqueness of the current situation. Coronavirus outbreak has negatively impacted situation of young people, especially those in vulnerable positions. Since the scale of this new problem seems to be huge and - in many aspects - unaddressed, we monitor steps taken by authorities, comment and share the practices among the project partners.

We were also forced to adjust the project timetable and the meeting dates to the changing situation. The two learning activities were postponed due to the lockdown but we hope to organize all planned meetings by the end of the project. We are sure that this unusual situation can be interpreted as a lesson about youth rights, democracy, solidarity, and the necessity of being flexible and watchful.

The partners in the project have prepared short reports on country situation during coronavirus. We remain in touch and we deliberate the possible development of situation, monitoring national and international context.



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## **AENIE (Portugal):**

*The measures adopted in Portugal to face the spread of COVID-19, either to try not to overload the national health system, or for individual and collective health, were a series of actions that put the country in the so-called "state of emergency", arguably necessary, but sometimes misinterpreted or over-executed. The families adopted extreme care measures, without realizing that they were also fomenting other imbalances (...)*

*Some youngsters were unable to go outside for a period of about 2 months, without seeing their boyfriends or girlfriends, without being with friends even with the safety measures. 2 months of total social and familiar isolation, some of them don't want to spend time with the family (part of being a teenager) and they saw themselves closed in their rooms looking through a window or a computer screen. Even if we understand the fear from the parents and how they wanted to protect their children, they allowed the fear to spread to the kids with serious consequences for their emotional balance.*

*Smaller children are easier to distract inside the house and an adult has the ability to understand and accept the situation, something that a teenager has more difficulties to do thus they were the ones to suffer more with this culture of fear that spread like water that runs through the fingers and that we couldn't contain ... were also the ones that suffered the most from the isolation to which they were subjected.*

*Some youngsters started to develop depression and anxiety, they lost weight, they had difficulties to sleep and concentrating in school work, they didn't wanted to communicate, started to stay more at home and not wanting to leave so often, they stopped their physical activity, difficulty in communication and family experience with consequent isolation in the bedroom, are some of the many symptoms that young people have revealed. Associated with these aspects, we already had young people who already had social anxiety and who worsened their situation with this quarantine. As we know, anxiety always comes from fear, in this case the fear of interpersonal relationships, with which, better or worse, they had to confront each day at school and with the proper accompaniment, they grew in their ability to relate more and better.*



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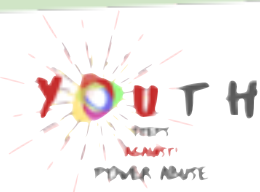
## AWA (Poland)

*Coronavirus in Poland had a big impact on citizens' rights in Poland. Imposed restrictions on mobility, access to goods, services and public institutions have changed the daily routine of Polish people. Among those affected were young people whose rights, especially those under age, were also affected. 1 April was a day when mobility restrictions on young people under age of 18 were imposed. For the following three weeks teens were prohibited from going out without parents' supervision. The solution - designed to prevent teens from roaming around after the schools closure - was broadly criticized by youth and children's rights NGO and civic society. Finally, the government withdrew from this idea during so-called "first wave of unfreezing after Covid-19". This is just one, and probably, the most vivid example of how young people were profiled as potential disease-spreaders and securitized.*

*As always, the most sad and exclusive practices, are hidden behind closed doors. After the schools closed in mid-March, the education system - after few days of adjusting - went on-line. In mid-April first concerns arouse as it turned out that a big share of schoolchildren and teens (difficult to precise the real statistics) virtually disappeared from system: without computers or tablets, without proper living conditions, without the motivation and the contact with teachers, they have remained un-logged from Polish education system, ignoring classes or being too distracted or ashamed to participate. Some schools have started to contact parents and send inspections but nevertheless, the problem of unequal participation to the education service (which is a right and duty of every child and young person under 18) during coronavirus outbreak was highlighted. This school year, which is just about to end, will be remembered as a year that tested the systematic capacity to provide every child and young person with proper education. Unfortunately, we have striking evidences to claim that this capacity is not enough. Lack of tools, innovations and under-investment of education system together with unpreparedness of teachers to deal with similar occasions costed many young people wasted time. As always, those who paid the price were groups at risk of exclusion: young people with migrant background (to the great extent left aside without any additional support), those struggling with economic obstacles, those from abusive and violent families, those with underlying health conditions and disabilities.*



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## Permacultura Cantabria (Spain)

*In Spain, the coronavirus has become one of the events with the greatest impact remembered, especially at an economic level. Production has stalled, consumption has dropped dramatically, and markets are falling to levels we haven't seen in a long time.*

*It has completely changed social relations and the behaviour of citizens in almost all areas, and that will foreseeably change the world panorama as we know it. This is how the coronavirus is affecting and will affect the Spanish economy in 2020.*

*Laying the impact on the economy aside, lets focus on the subject of the project: power abuse. Undoubtedly, the pandemic has had an enormous effect on the Spanish society. Coronavirus and power abuse are two terms that already separately generate emotions such as fear. If we put them together, the combination turns very dangerous. These days of lockdown put the magnifying glass on power abuse which touches victims of all ages and backgrounds, but especially those who are for some reason unprivileged, such as young women.*

*The world lives confined. That means that most of us cannot leave our house if it is not for what is strictly necessary. For many people, confinement is proving difficult to fulfill due to the social (or antisocial implications in this case) that this has. However, for young women who suffer gender violence, this forced confinement is a sentence. Condemned to live with their abusers, women who suffer gender violence are the great victims of this generalized situation of confinement. When there are also minors involved, the situation is even more serious, since in the same way their lives are in constant danger.*

*The Secretary General of the United Nations, António Guterres, has referred in one of his last interventions to gender inequality as a form of power abuse, which has increased even more in this pandemic. To protect women and girls from gender-based violence, which always increases in situations of conflict and insecurity, Antonio has pledged to "prevent and rectify domestic violence as part of our national and global responses."*



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*The Spanish Ministry of Equality has released the guide “We are with you. We stop gender violence together” in order to publicize the resources available to citizens. And it is that gender violence, although it affects the woman victim of such abuse or mistreatment in the first place, also affects the rest of society. Years ago, male violence stopped being something exclusive to the private sphere and became a social scourge against which all of us must fight.*

*When these initial moments of overflow due to COVID-19 pass, it will be very important to continue working against power abuse, gender and intra-family violence, because it is expected that the social resources for the victims will not meet the needs at a time in that the fragility and vulnerability of the weakest will be even greater.*



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## CFCECAS (Romania)

Between March and June 2020, CFCECAS has provided online sessions through Help-Desk, a platform used to offer support for specialists in social services and help them make the necessary changes and adaptations during this difficult period.

We collected a number of problems that were reported to us at Help-Desk either by social workers or by young people. We registered more than 450 requests concerning the situation of youngsters.

In this material we will refer only about young people (aged 16-24) who are accessing social services:

- **young people who benefit from rehabilitation services;**

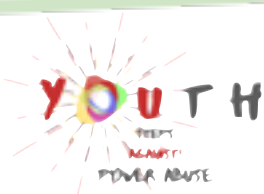
When school programs were suspended, these counseling and support programs were also suspended. In general, the activity has been transferred to online platforms, but not all young people have computers or the skills to use them. When the State of Emergency was declared the counseling and support activities were dramatically affected, and therefore the ability of the youngsters to prepare for the period of physical isolation was also affected. There were no opportunities for consultation and training of young people to participate in the reorganization of counseling services. However, social workers in County Centers for Resources and Educational Assistance continued to be proactive and encourage young people with disabilities to continue their learning activities and remain interested in career guidance programs.

- **young people who benefit from community support services (day centers or counseling services)**

For these young people, these services were interrupted. During this period, the programs continued with online support from specialists, but could not cover the real recovery needs. These young people did not participate in the decisions on how to continue the recovery programs or their involvement was minimal. The home isolation order was applied without a training period and thus the possibility of consulting them was excluded.



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- **young people who are accommodated in residential care centers;**

1. These covered two areas of concern:

*Problems encountered by young people who wanted to meet their schoolmates or friends. The question among young people was the same: when can we get out of the centers and see our friends again?*

*The question from the specialists was: how can we offer them the opportunity to see their friends again, but without being at risk of infection and without infecting their colleagues in the centers? The pandemic affected the adolescents emotionally, in an overwhelming proportion, and the residential care centers were difficult places to bear during this period. Although limited, co-production was the approach used to involve the youngsters in developing safe strategies to allow them to see relevant people again. This is a theme that CFCECAS has included in the training programs of public and private social services staff. However, training is needed in the coming period to increase the capacity of young people to participate in how they use support from social services.*

*Problems encountered by young people who had a part-time job.*

*The decision to isolate the centers from the outside world, led to the situation where some young people lost their jobs. Only 10% of the cases reported to us managed to negotiate with employers to keep their jobs. During this period employers remain uncertain about their ability to maintain the same workforce.*

- **young people who have been isolated as a result of suspected SARS-Cov-2 infection;**

*All day centers were suspended, and the ability to stay in touch with specialists was minimal. Before the onset of the COVID-19 epidemic, half of Romanian children were at risk of poverty and social exclusion (Eurostat 2017).*



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