



# Covid

# Screenagers

Socially distant, digitally close

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

**Study report: Albania**

November 2021



# Acknowledgements

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

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# Foreword

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

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

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

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

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

friendly behaviour as a result of the pandemic; this is a great source of hope for the challenges to come.

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

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

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

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

**Milan Gnjidić**

**Head of Education, Society and Governance Contracts, Western Balkans**



# Report overview

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

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

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

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

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

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

is followed by reviewing young people's coping strategies for preserving mental wellbeing and utilizing professional mental health support during the pandemic.

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

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

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

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

# Methodology and approach

## Study background

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

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

## Purpose of the study

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

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

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

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

## Methodology

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

### First phase: Participatory approach to study design

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

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

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

### Second phase: Quantitative survey

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

**Table 1: Achieved sample across the six Western Balkan countries**

Albania	1172
Bosnia & Herzegovina	1295
Kosovo	1261
Montenegro	1156
North Macedonia	1155
Serbia	1232
<b>Total sample</b>	<b>7271</b>

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

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

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

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

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

### Third phase: Qualitative analysis

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

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

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





Screenagers

# Albania

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# To whom we spoke



Main Sample:  
**1004**

## Gender



## Age

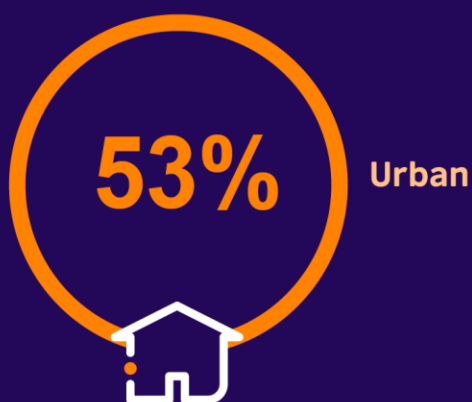


18 – 24 years old



25 – 29 years old

## Settlement type



Urban

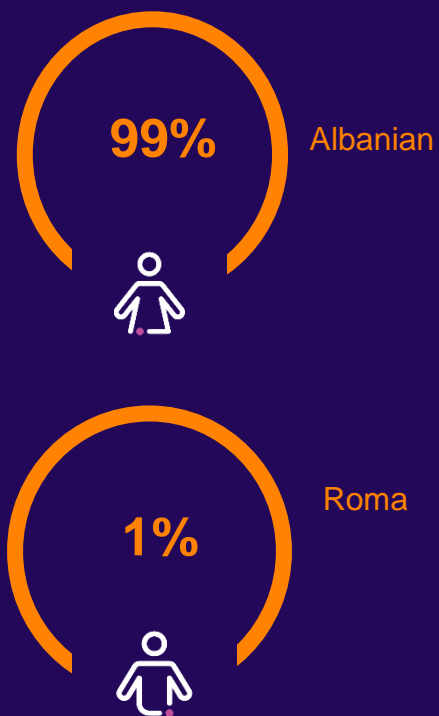


Rural

## Region (%)



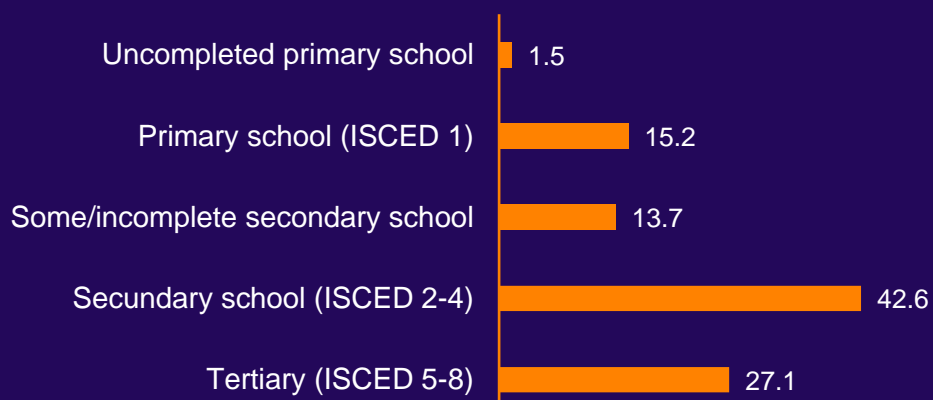
## Ethnicity



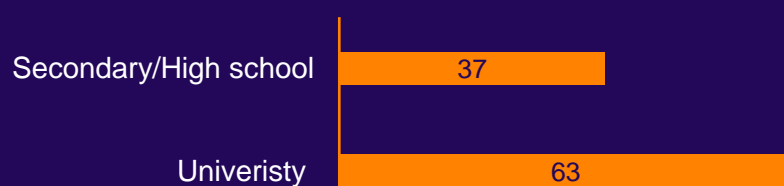
## Activity status



## Highest completed education



## Student status (n=351)



## Boost Sample

Roma	94
Youth study abroad	31
Youth with disabilities	28
NEETS	50



Total Sample

1172

“

*I graduated from a VET school last year, and I have been trying to find a job since then. When the pandemic started, I became even more concerned about my employment prospects. I am still trying to get employment, but nothing is happening. I started seriously considering leaving the country. Even with a job, people in Albania struggle to make ends meet. The pandemic is making it even harder. (Male, 19)*

“

*When university teaching moved to the online delivery mode, I went back to my hometown in the countryside. What impressed me the most during that time is how my group at the university became more cohesive and connected. We helped each other with learning like never before, we became more intimate and started to share personal issues more openly. We became more supportive of each other. All this happened online. It might be that we were socially distant, but digitally close. (Female, 23)*



# YOUTH LIVELIHOODS AND EMPLOYMENT DURING THE PANDEMIC

**“ The pandemic has taken a heavy toll on youth livelihoods and employment in Albania. Every other young person surveyed reported that their income decreased during the pandemic, while almost the same share of youth reported that they and their families faced increased challenges in making ends meet during the pandemic. Rural youth and those with lower educational attainment were hit the hardest by these financial hardships. Furthermore, vulnerable groups, such as Roma and those not in education, employment, or training (NEET), were found to have been disproportionately negatively affected financially.**

**Over half of the unemployed with previous work experience said they lost their jobs due to or during the pandemic. A similar share of employed youth declared pay cuts. Almost nine in ten employed young people went to their workplace all or most of the time.**

## Backdrop

In 2020, the Albanian economy found itself reeling from a ‘double shock’. As in all of Europe, the country was struck by the Covid-19 epidemic from March 2020, with accompanying lockdowns and social distancing measures which, at times, brought the economy to a near halt. Yet even before the global pandemic struck, the Albanian economy was reeling from the effects of a devastating earthquake which struck the country in November 2019, destroying or damaging hundreds of homes and causing overall damages valued at 7 per cent of GDP.<sup>1</sup> According to IMF data, Albania’s GDP contracted by -3.5 per cent in 2020, having grown by 4.1 per cent in 2018 and a more modest 2.2 per cent in 2019. In 2021, the IMF is forecasting growth of 5.0 per cent of GDP, while the European Commission’s Spring Economic Forecast predicts a more modest 4.0 per cent of GDP recovery, on the back of recovering private consumption, accelerating public spending and post-earthquake reconstruction.<sup>2</sup>

In total, the Albanian Government rolled out a support package worth 2.9 per cent of GDP in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This figure included additional health sector spending, as well as targeted economic support measures, primarily in the form of wage support to sectors most affected by the pandemic. At the height of the pandemic, the Government also doubles unemployment and social support for a period of three months. A number of businesses were also allowed to defer tax payments. Overall, the response package was somewhat lower than in other countries of the region, primarily due to Albania’s high public debt levels. Yet a parallel boost to economic activity was post-earthquake reconstruction spending of 2.2 per cent of GDP.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> International Monetary Fund (2021). [Albania IMF Country Report no. 20/309](#).

<sup>2</sup> For the most up to date IMF data see: [Country profile Albania](#); see also the [European Commission’s Economic Forecast Spring 2021](#).

<sup>3</sup> International Monetary Fund (2021). [Albania IMF Country Report no. 20/309](#).

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Albania

Youth unemployment estimates for Albania offer a mixed picture. The World Bank's Regular Economic Report on the Western Balkans from Spring 2021 suggests that youth unemployment in the 15-29 age category declined from 21.5 per cent in 2019 to 20.9 per cent in 2020. Overall unemployment meanwhile rose slightly, from 11.5 per cent to 11.7 per cent. Yet as the World Bank notes in its report, these indicators do not reflect a rise in the number of jobs, but rather an increase in inactivity – a situation in which unemployed people temporarily gave up the search for a job and were thus not counted as unemployed jobseekers. This was a trend visible across the whole of the Western Balkans, with the labour force participation rate declining by 1 per cent to 59.5 per cent in Albania in 2020.<sup>4</sup>

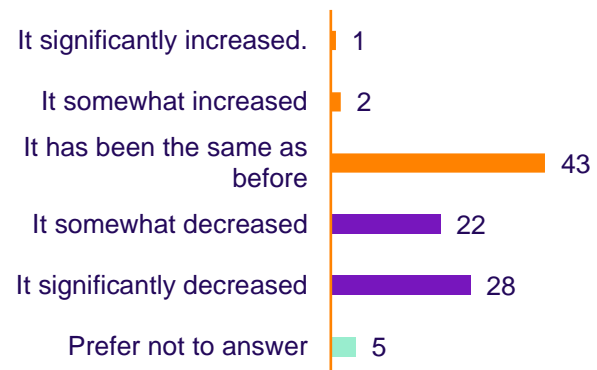
Clearly, with the youth unemployment rate double the national rate, this group faced the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic in a vulnerable state. Indeed, previous studies have shown that being poor, and unemployed were among main concerns stated by young people in Albania, with more than half of those surveyed declaring that they were 'very fearful' of such situations.<sup>5</sup> Yet it is precisely these elements which the Covid-19 pandemic threatened to bring down on the heads of young people. Prior to the pandemic, World Bank data suggested an even higher unemployment rate among those aged 15-24 (26.98 per cent). Interestingly, this rate was somewhat lower among female youth (25.85 per cent) than male (27.76 per cent).<sup>6</sup>

## Findings

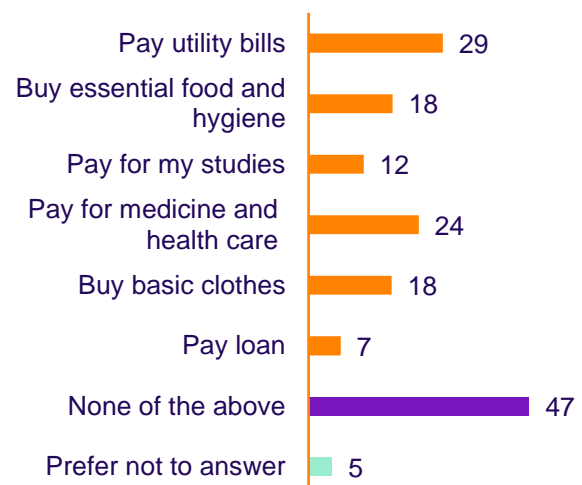
**The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic only worsened the economic position of Albanian youth, particularly those with lower levels of educational attainment and rural youth.** Every other young person surveyed reported that their income had decreased during the pandemic (50 per cent), with more than half of these (28 per cent of all surveyed) reporting a 'significant' decrease in personal income. By contrast, only 2 per cent reported that their income had increased, while 43 per cent reported that it had remained the same (Figure 1a). Moreover, rural youth and those with lower levels of education were most likely to be affected by a drop in incomes. Among married young people financial hardship were felt even stronger, as testified by a young mother: *"The pandemic started bad for us, as my husband took a pay cut and our monthly income decreased significantly... I am unemployed and I am taking care about the child. For the first time since we got married, we faced*

*challenges to meeting primary needs. We rely on family support, but they struggled too."* (Female, 25

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



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



**As a result of the pandemic, 46 per cent of youth reported that they and their families struggled to make ends meet, seen most clearly through increased challenges faced in paying for basic goods and services (Figure 1b).** Among those who reported some kind of decrease in income, this figure rises to 53 per cent. The most frequent reported problem was paying for utility bills (29 per cent), essential food and hygiene (18 per cent) and basic clothes (18 per cent). Reflecting increased healthcare problems, 24 per cent of respondents stated increased problems in accessing medicines and healthcare services. Again, youth in rural areas and those with lower educational attainment were most likely to face difficulties in paying for basic goods and services. Difficulties in making ends meet were echoed by our focus group participants too, as one of

<sup>4</sup> World Bank (2021). [Western Balkans Regular Economic Report No.19 Subdued Recovery](#).

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2019); [Youth Study Albania 2018/2019](#).

<sup>6</sup> Detailed data can be accessed here: <https://data.worldbank.org/country/albania>.

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Albania

them admitted: “I felt isolated due to the pandemic restrictions. I have had economic difficulties, paying rent and bills. I am living one day at a time...there is a lot of uncertainty.” (Male, 20 Albania)

**The Covid-19 pandemic had a disproportionately negative impact on already vulnerable youth sub-groups such as Roma and NEET.** Almost two out of three Roma (62 per cent) and NEET youth (65 per cent) reported decreased incomes as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. When it comes to paying for basic needs, 82 per cent of Roma youth reported that they and their families struggled to do so – almost double that reported by youth as a whole – while almost three-quarters (74 per cent) of NEET reported the same problem. Three-quarters of Roma youth (73 per cent) stated that they and their families struggled to buy basic food and hygiene products, while approximately two-thirds struggled to pay utility bills (67 per cent) or for medicines and healthcare (64 per cent). Youth from the NEET subcategory faced similar problems, albeit in a different order – for this group, the biggest problem (60 per cent) was paying utility bills, followed by buying essential food and hygiene (55 per cent) and paying for medicines and healthcare (51 per cent).

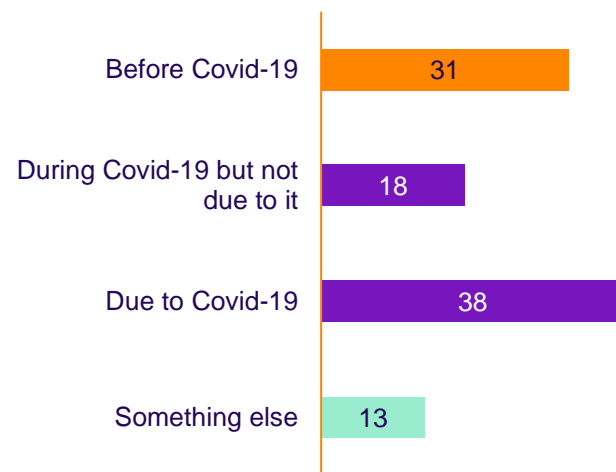
**Among youth in employment, the coronavirus pandemic led to both job losses and wage cuts.** Over half of unemployed respondents reported no work experience so far (55 per cent). Of those with work experience, one in two said they lost their job during the pandemic (56 per cent), of which 38 per cent attributed their job loss to Covid-19 pandemic, while a further 18 per cent claimed they lost their job during the pandemic but not due to it (**Figure 2**). Others reported losing jobs before the pandemic or attributed their unemployment to some other reasons. Closer analysis also suggested that older youth (those in the 25-29 age range) were more likely to lose their jobs, as were men compared to women. According to the official administrative data on the labour market suggest that these layoffs most probably occurred in the service sector (cafés, bars and restaurants), where the employment decreased by 31.8%, followed by hotels with -20.2% and factories with -12.8%.<sup>7</sup>

Of those who remained employed, there were more respondents reporting that their salaries had been cut than those that reported them remaining unchanged (47 vs 46 per cent). Among those reporting pay cuts, more than half (26 per cent) reported significant cuts; conversely, only 5 per cent reported wage increases during the pandemic period. Beyond these general trends, the analysed data also suggested that those with lower educational levels were more likely to have experienced wage cuts. In addition to this, those young people not in full-time employment appeared

to have been most likely to face pay cuts, as were the self-employed and seasonal workers.

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

*You lost your job due to/during a Covid-19 pandemic or before a pandemic? Base: unemployed respondents with previous work experience n=97; Unit=%*



### **The pandemic further exaggerated bleak employment options for young job applicants.**

Asked how many times over the last six months they applied for a job, nearly six out of ten (58 per cent) of unemployed youth surveyed answered – none, suggesting a bleak range of available job possibilities. A further one in three respondents (35 per cent) had applied between one and three times, while only 7 per cent had applied four or more times for a job. As suggested by other analyses of the labour market in Albania, the main reason for such job seeking behaviour could be a lack of job supply. In January 2021 there were only 59 job offers from businesses on the portal of the National Employment and Skills Agency compared to previous years, when job offers from the business sector amounted to about 40,000.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, labour supply among youth raised, as 19,000 young people aged 15-29 were registered as jobseekers in employment offices during the first half of 2020 or 16 per cent more than in the first half of 2019.<sup>9</sup> This is further underpinned by our qualitative data. While young people feel motivated to become employed, they see few job opportunities in Albania – so much so that all of our focus group participants reported that they were at least looking for jobs outside the country. They further suggested that youth felt stuck in a loop where unemployment prevented them from gaining experience, which in turn prevented them from getting a job, leading – in turn – to continued unemployment. As one high school student in our focus group stated: “I think the most important element when applying at a company is experience,

<sup>7</sup> Partner Albania for Change and Development. (2021). [The impact of COVID-19 on youth employment in Albania.](#)

<sup>8</sup> Partner Albania for Change and Development. (2021). [The impact of COVID-19 on youth employment in Albania.](#)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

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Albania

which is sad because how am I going to get experienced without having the opportunity to work.” (Male, 18)

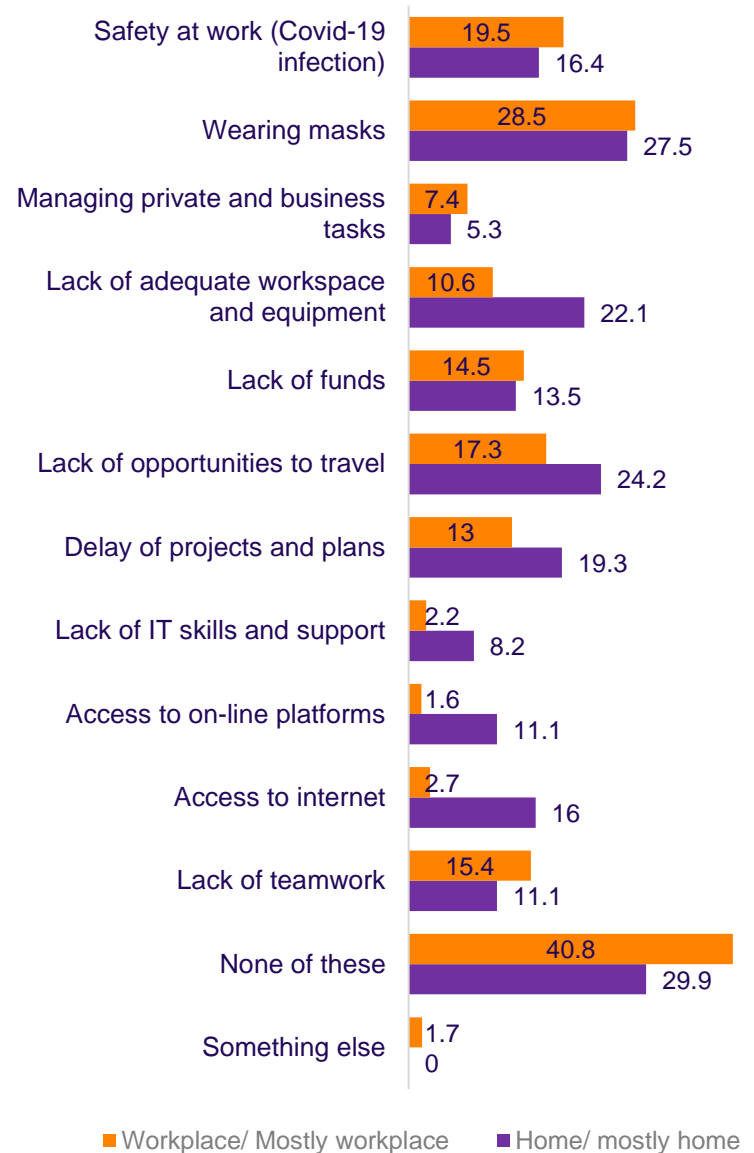
Closer scrutiny of the survey results also highlights job seeking problems faced by youth in rural areas, or those with lower levels of educational attainment. Among rural unemployed youth, 61 per cent had not submitted any job applications compared to 51 per cent among urban youth. Worst off seemed to be unemployed youth with nothing more than a completed primary education – in this sub-group three out of four (76 per cent) had not made a single job application, compared to every other (54 per cent) with a completed secondary education and one in five with a completed tertiary education (19 per cent) who had failed to apply for a single job.

**Given the extensive lockdowns imposed in Albania at the beginning of the pandemic, as well as the tendency towards social distancing, it is perhaps surprising that 86 per cent reported going to the workplace all or most of the time during the pandemic.** Indeed, only 6 per cent of employed youth in Albania stated that they had worked from home all the time during the pandemic. A further 16 per cent reported mixed working from home with going to the workplace. Youth with lower levels of educational attainment, and those living in rural areas were found to be more likely to go to the workplace, suggesting a heightened exposure to the risk of obtaining Covid-19 relative to other groups. Moreover, the survey finds that working youth who went to their workplace all or most of the time were more likely to contract the virus, than those who worked from home all or most of the time.

**Different work arrangements during the pandemic were not fully reflected in the work-related challenges among working youth in Albania.** In terms of the challenges faced by those going to the workplace all or most of the time versus those working remotely all or most of the time, mask wearing, and the risk of contracting Covid-19 were reported almost equally as being among the greatest problems, with only slightly more of those going to work (19.5 per cent) reporting this as a problem compared to those working from home (16.4 per cent, **Figure 3**). Home workers more often reported some problems than those going to the workplace such as internet access (16 vs 2.7 per cent), access to online platforms (11.1 vs 1.6 per cent) and lack of adequate workspace/equipment (22.1 vs 10.6 per cent). On the other hand, two-thirds of those surveyed working from home at least some of the time reported the decreased risk of contracting Covid-19 as being one of the biggest advantages of this type of work, while another third cited saving on commuting time and better time management as other benefits. Perhaps surprisingly, lack of teamwork was a problem more often reported by those going to the workplace (15.4 per cent) rather than home workers (11.1 per cent).

**Figure 3: Work-related challenges**

*Have you faced any of the following work-related challenges during Covid-19 pandemic? Base: employed respondents, n=446*





# IMPACTS ON EDUCATION

“ ***With most forms of education forced to move online, the vast majority of young people felt that in 2020 they learned much less than in the past. Some described 2020 as a wasted year from the point of view of education. Nearly one in two students reported issues with accessing the internet and online learning platforms, with female, rural and students with disadvantaged economic background being affected the most by these issues. The social aspect of education was also negatively affected, with around two-thirds of students stating that they felt less connected to their schools or universities than before the pandemic and more distant from other fellow students.*** ”

## Backdrop

The 2019/2020 academic year has been one of significant disruption in Albania. To begin with, the November 2019 earthquake led to the closure of a number of schools due to their partial or complete destruction. It is estimated that – as a result of damage caused by the earthquake – some 96 schools completely or partly ceased to operate, affecting around 40,000 pupils. An estimated 20,000 students in quake-affected areas of central Albania also had to be transferred to other, already densely packed schools in the region.<sup>10</sup> The Covid-19 pandemic thus only added an additional layer of disruption, with all education institutions forced online from March 2020 until the end of the school year in

<sup>10</sup> Balkan Insight (2020). [Albania to Open Schools in September Despite COVID-19 Rise](#).

June. While primary and secondary students returned to classrooms in mid-September, university classes continued online.<sup>11</sup> The decision to continue with online teaching at universities was not met with approval among many students. As the new academic year kicked off on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020, dozens of students protested in Tirana, demanding that the government restore in-person teaching at universities. Students just starting their studies felt most negatively impacted by online teaching.

## Findings

**With classes conducted in various online modes, students felt that they had learned less during the Covid-19 pandemic.** Indeed, seven out of ten surveyed students (71 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that ‘*During the Covid-time I learned less, than I would learn in regular time*’ (Figure 4). More university than high school students reported learning loss during the pandemic (75 vs 66 percent). Furthermore, a greater share of students reported they did not participate in the classes to the same extent as before, compared to those who said they did (44 vs 39 per cent). Accessing the internet and online platforms was a problem for nearly one in two students (42 per cent), though it is notable that the exact same percentage stated that they did not experience such problems. However, closer analysis of the gathered data shows that students had a significantly more pronounced sense that they learned less during the coronavirus pandemic if they had internet access issues compared to students with no such issues (83 vs 55 per cent).

**Digital disparities in education were felt the strongest by female students, rural students and those with disadvantaged economic background.**

One in two female students across Albania reported experiencing issues with accessing the internet and online platforms (48 per cent) compared to one in three male students (35 per cent). Given the more limited options for accessing good-quality internet in rural areas of Albania, it is not surprising that one in two rural students had problems with accessing the

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

## Covid Screenagers

Socially distant, Digitally close

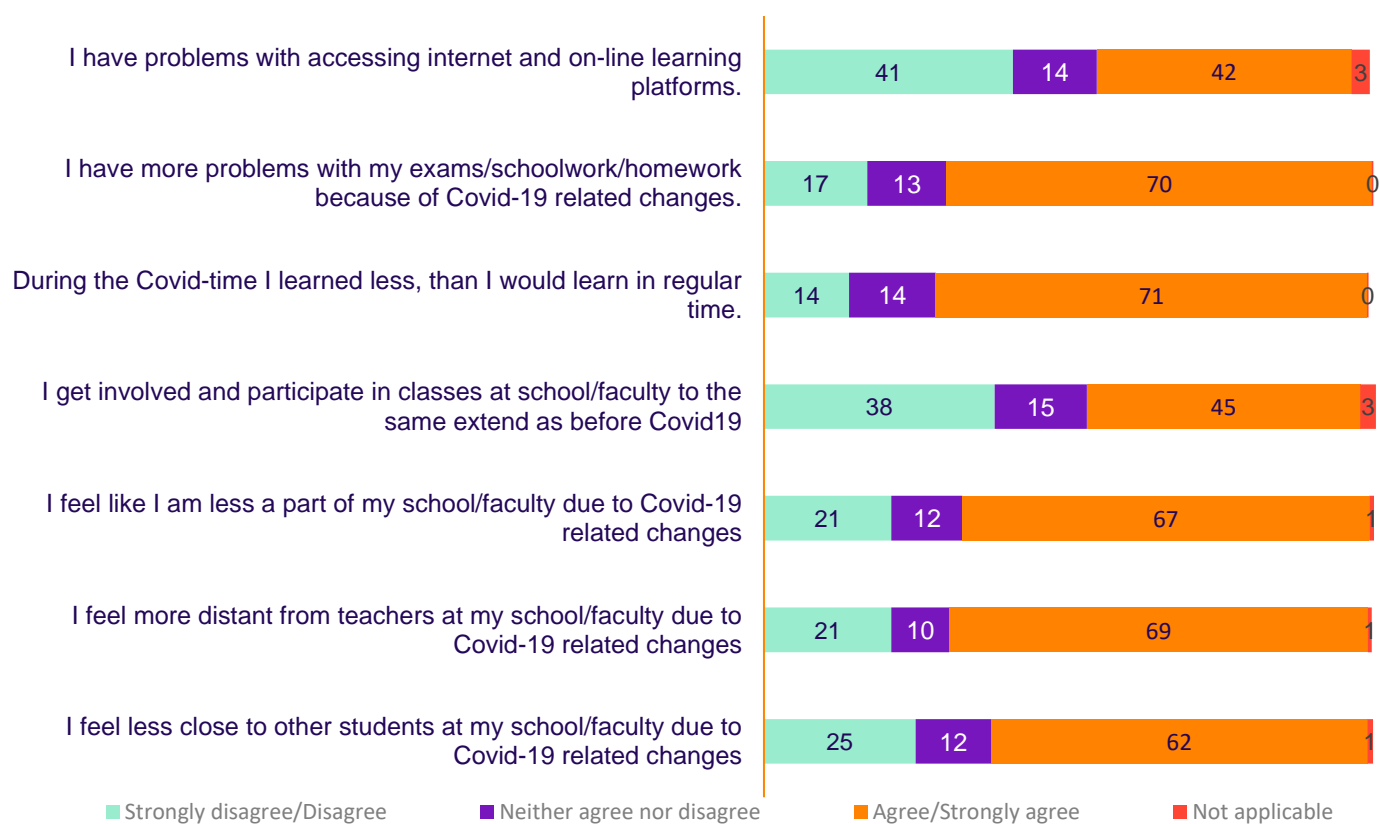
Albania

internet and online learning platforms (52 per cent), compared to one in three urban students (36 per cent). Furthermore, a large share of students in Albania reported financial difficulties during the pandemic, as 43 per cent of them reported income decline and further 27 per cent reported difficulties to pay for their studies. Those who suffered financially due to pandemic, particularly to pay for utility bills and buy basic clothes, were more likely to had limited access to internet and online learning platforms

compared to their peers with no financial challenges. These clearly suggest that students with disadvantaged economic background were disproportionately affected by remote learning, widening further educational inequalities in the country.

**Figure 4: Education and Covid-19**

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Base: respondents who are in school/university, n=351



Qualitative data gathered from focus group participants also supports the conclusion that most students learned less during the period of online instruction forced upon the education system by Covid-19. According to one high school student: *“This was a very hard year. We would be lying to ourselves if we think anyone benefitted this academic year and learned something. It is very hard to concentrate, teachers and students are neither interested nor responsible enough in having regular classes. We have to keep in mind that a lot of students cannot access the internet or don’t have a computer to join online classes.”* (Female, 18). Another student was even more blunt: *“The only way to salvage this academic year is repeating it entirely from the beginning. I don’t think it was a fruitful year and students did not actually learn anything.”* (Male, 20). Meanwhile, another student offered a more nuanced perspective: *“I think students were*

*completely uninterested in learning during this time. Most of them did not learn anything. But on the other hand, the ones that are interested to learn new things had a great chance. They had more time to research and focus on what they really want to learn, not only the standard lessons from school.”* (Female, 19)

**Students reported increased problems with exams/homework and increased time spent studying.** More than two thirds of students (69 per cent) reported that they felt more distant from their teachers/lecturers at school/faculty as a result of the Covid-19 related changes to education, with university students more likely to report this than high school students. Seven out of ten (71 per cent) reported problems with exams/schoolwork. Again, the problem was a more common occurrence among university students than those in high school (74 vs 65 per cent, respectively), and among youth in rural than in urban areas (77 vs 67 per cent, respectively).

## Covid Screenagers

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Meanwhile, 44 per cent of students believe that they spent more time studying than before the pandemic, while one quarter stated that this time had not changed, and another quarter (26 per cent) stated that time spent studying had decreased. This could perhaps be seen as a positive development, with students becoming more devoted to studying in the absence of other (social) distractions; however, it could also suggest that students needed to spend more time studying in order to compensate for the lower quality of online instruction.

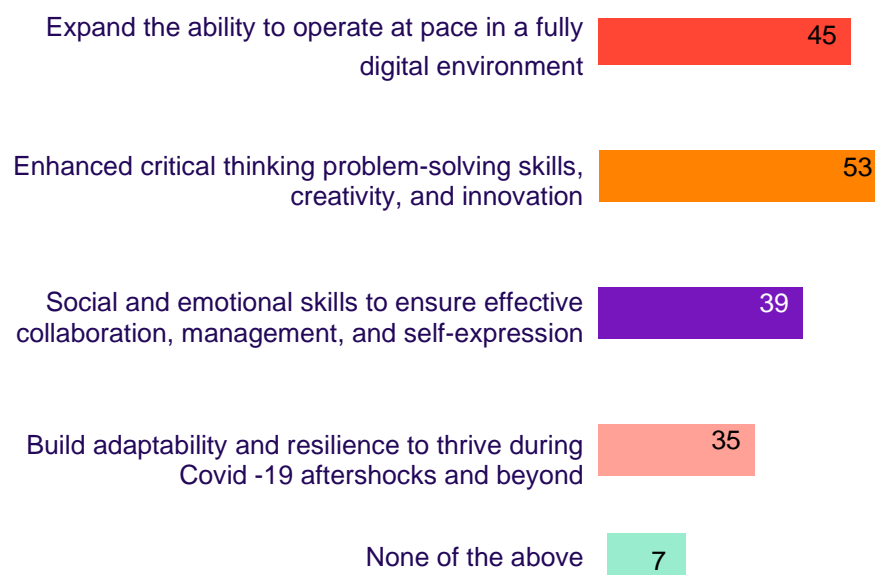
**Measures related to Covid-19 also negatively affected the social aspects of education.** Almost two-thirds (62 per cent) of students declared that they feel less close to other students at their school or faculty than before the pandemic. Even more students (67 per cent) reported feeling a reduced sense of belonging to their school or faculty as a result of Covid-19 related measures. University students and students in rural areas were again more likely to express such feelings. Yet on a positive note, three out of five students declared that they

were just as happy to study at their school or faculty as before the pandemic.

**A different skillset would be needed to unleash the potential of students in Albania and make them thrive in the post-Covid future.** Asked about the key skills they think will be needed to thrive in the future, every other young person (53 per cent) stressed the need for problem-solving skills, creativity, and innovation. Nearly half of them (45 per cent) also stated that the ability to operate at pace in a fully digital environment would also be key for success in the future. Social and emotional skills to ensure effective cooperation and self-expression were seen as key by just over a third of those surveyed (39 per cent), while a similar proportion also stressed the need to build resilience in order to thrive in a post-Covid-19 world (**Figure 5**). Focus group participants broadly agreed with the skills priorities, as one of them commented: *“Being resourceful, spry and energetic, working very well in a group and under pressure, being responsible and multitasking, and having ICT skills are key for employment”* (Male, 19)

### Figure 5: Future skills

What skills will you need the most to thrive in the post-Covid world. Please select the top 2 priorities. Base: respondents who are in school/university, n=351; Unit: %





“ At the beginning I felt the lockdown happened so fast, and the amount of news and social media around it was so intense. For a while, my Viber and WhatsApp groups were full of discussions about the virus. All these made me feel anxious. At one point, I left some of those chat groups because I could not find another way to reduce the amount of information about the virus. Some of my friends were angry on me because of that.” (Male, 21)

“ It’s been a rollercoaster of emotions. I’ve found that social media are a source of light-hearted entertainment. It’s great to see some humour even in times of crisis. I’ve been spending some time without my phone each day and have cooked a lot. (Female, 24)

“ I worked in a small cafe in the capital in the past two years. Last April I got fired. That created a lot of uncertainty to me. I remember the sleepless nights in April. I got depressed. Most days, I didn’t want to do anything or get out of my bed and I found it hard to motivate myself with nothing to do. (Male, 25)

“ The pandemic made me feel very much disconnected from my friends. It put everything on hold: traveling, socializing, education, the future. This has allowed my mind to go to the dark side, where my fears come out. My main fear is 'How long will my life be on pause?' (Female, 20)

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

“ *Day-to-day lifestyle of young people in Albania has been strongly impacted by the pandemic, as close to three in every five young people reported that their daily routine changed. The effect of the pandemic on their mental wellbeing was modest comparing to other Western Balkans countries. Young people in Albania felt more worried and annoyed than before the pandemic like in the other countries in the region, but they felt the least lonely and hopeless in the region. Despite this, one in four young people felt the need for some kind of professional psychological support. However, they rarely used it, as only 7 per cent of young people used, or were referred to mental health services.*

## Backdrop

Prior to the pandemic, young people in Albania lived a general active life, frequently going out with friends and socializing through a variety of activities, ranging from attending bars and cafes to sport. Indeed, Albania is remarkable in that as previous studies have shown half of young people surveyed frequently spending leisure time in bars and cafes, while another fifth did so sometimes. Even more remarkable is the fact that, according to some claims, Albania leads Europe in terms of the density of its cafes, surpassing even the like of Spain or France.<sup>12</sup> All of this changed sharply with the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic. During March and April 2020 in particular, authorities imposed strict daily and often weekend curfews. All educational activities were moved online. Bars, restaurants, cafes and other places of gathering were also closed for several months, with any kind of larger gatherings banned. Only from early May 2020 did these restrictions begin to ease. In this context, the recent study in Albania reported a negative impact of the pandemic on students' mental health.<sup>13</sup> It found that students who were not satisfied with Covid-19 prevention measures were more likely to have elevated levels of depression in comparison to those being satisfied, as well as students who believed that Covid-19 and quarantine can cause problems to their health were more likely to be screened positive for depression.

<sup>12</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2019); [Youth Study Albania 2018/2019](#).

<sup>13</sup> Mechili E. et al. (2021). [Is the mental health of young students and their family members affected during the quarantine period? Evidence](#)

[from the COVID-19 pandemic in Albania](#). Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing.

**Findings**

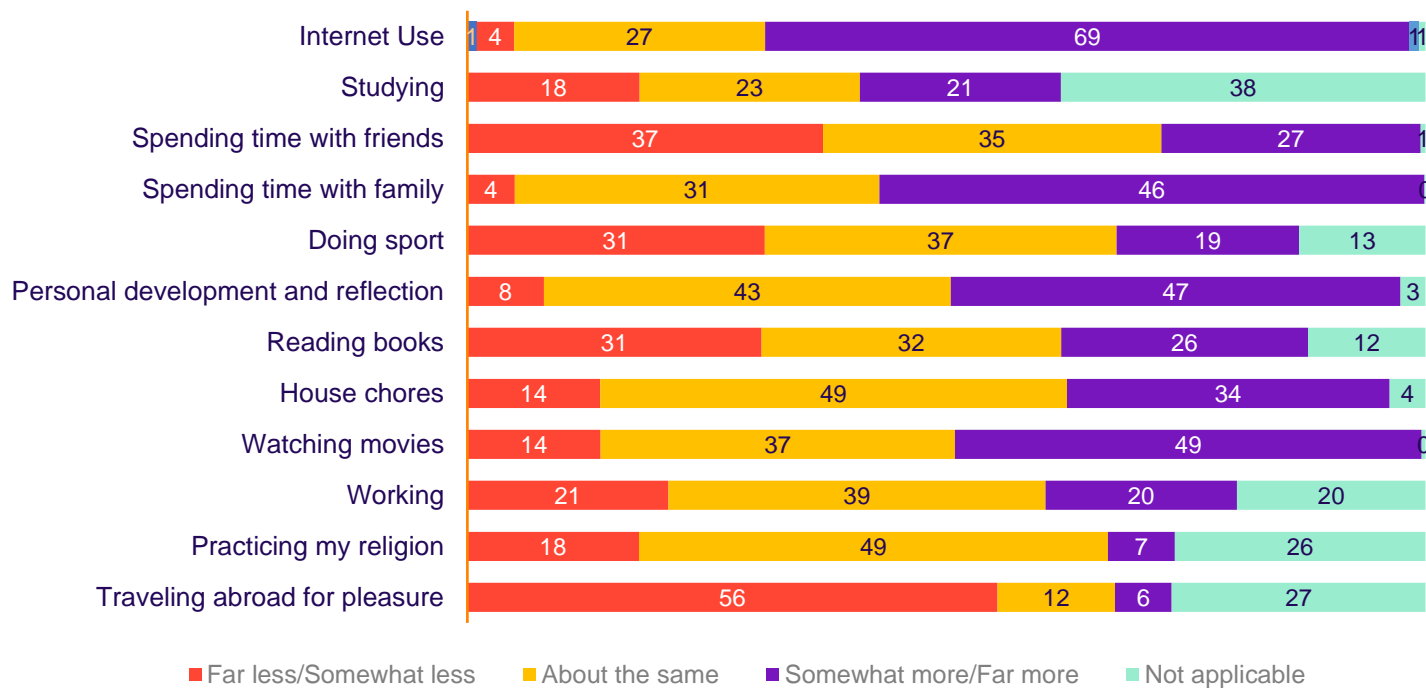
**The pandemic has changed the daily routine of most young people, particularly when it comes to urban youth.** Close to two in every three young people (58 per cent) reported that their daily routine had changed, particularly the younger cohort compared to older one (61 vs 52 per cent respectively). Urban youth also reported their daily routine being changed more often than rural youth, while the least impacted appear to have been Roma youth, with only 26 per cent of them reporting changes to their daily routines.

Analysing deeper how the time spent on various activities changed, seven out of ten individuals (69 per cent) reported more time spent using the internet, with close to half of those surveyed (47 per cent) reporting that they had used the internet 'far more' than before the pandemic. It is notable that, according to an earlier study internet use by young people in Albania was already high – 93 per cent described it as a regular activity – with a remarkable 3.9 hours being spent online daily.<sup>14</sup> On the other

hand, only 40 per cent of Roma youth reported spending more time on the internet. Such a finding is not surprising since the afore-mentioned study found that 1 in 10 of the poorest youth do not have access to the internet.<sup>15</sup> Further to the increase time spent on the internet, two-thirds of those surveyed reported spending more time with family – 40 per cent reported 'far more' time spent with family, while almost half of those surveyed (49 per cent) also reported more time spent watching movies. Close to half of those surveyed (47 per cent) decided to use their time in a more constructive way, focusing on activities described as 'personal development'.

Time spent on some otherwise 'normal' activities decreased significantly – more than half the young people surveyed reported a decline in time spent traveling for pleasure (56 per cent). There was also a clear decline in travelling abroad for pleasure (56 per cent), as well as time spent with friends – a decline of 37 per cent (**Figure 6**). In this context, it is interesting to note that young people met almost as many new people online during the coronavirus pandemic as face to face (37 vs 43 per cent).

**Figure 6: Impact of Covid-19 on behaviours/practices**  
 Compared with the time before Covid19, how much time you spend in the following activities? Unit: %



<sup>14</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2019); [Youth Study Albania 2018/2019](#).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

## Covid Screenagers

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Albania

Interesting differences are also observable between how different sub-groups of young people spent their time. Young women were more inclined to spend time on personal development compared to young men (55 vs 39 per cent). They were also more likely to increase their time spent with family (70 per cent versus 61 per cent), reading books (37 vs 14 per cent) and house chores (53 vs 16 per cent).

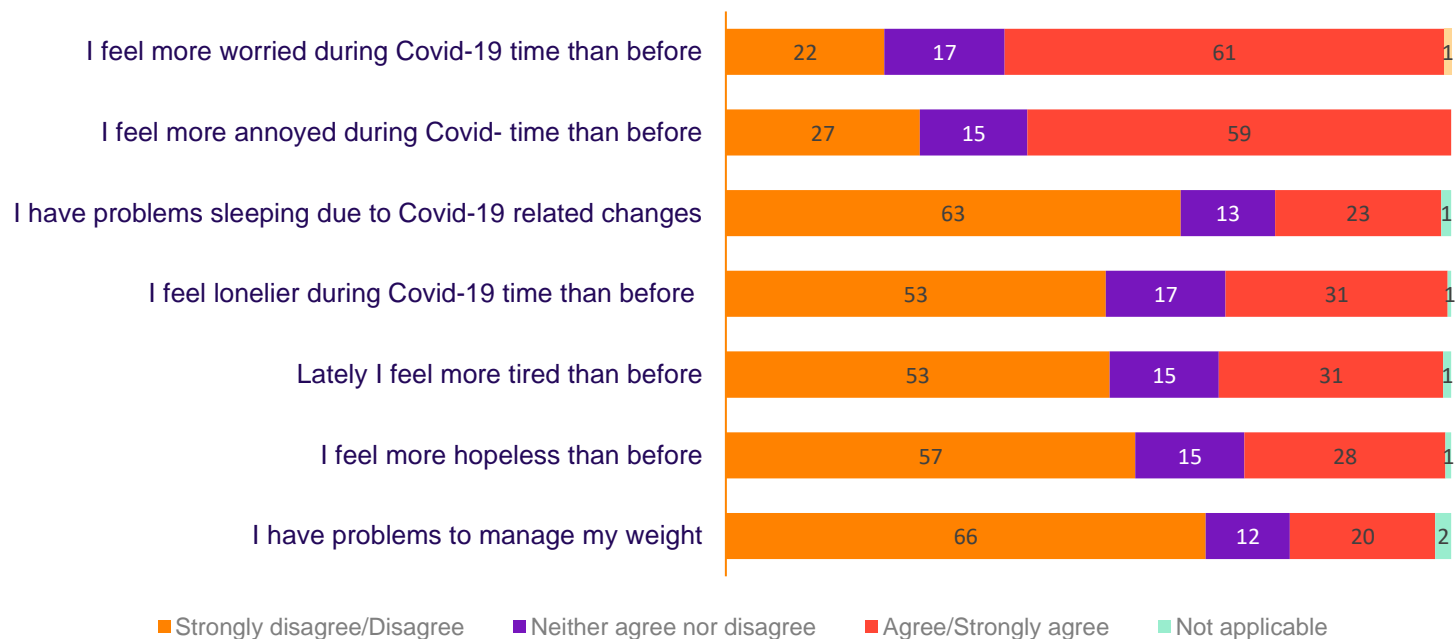
### **Broadly speaking, the coronavirus pandemic had a negative impact on the mental well-being of young people in Albania.**

Two out of three young people surveyed (65 per cent) admitted that the lack of freedom of movement resulting from the pandemic was very hard for them. Young men were more likely to report this as being a challenge for them, compared to young women. Delving into the specifics of their mental well-being, young people in Albania report feeling more worried (61 per cent) and more

annoyed (59 per cent) than before the Covid-19 pandemic, with older youth, young women and the unemployed more likely to report such feelings. On the other hand, during the coronavirus pandemic young people in Albania generally seem to be less impacted when compared to the region - around one third of them reported being hopeless, feeling lonelier and more tired than before the pandemic, and one-fourth of them report developing problems sleeping. On the other hand, most of them did not have weight problems (66 per cent), problems sleeping (63 per cent), did not feel more hopeless and lonelier than before the pandemic (57 and 52 per cent respectively). Young women and unemployed youth were more likely to report feeling lonely during the pandemic, while feelings of hopelessness were more common among rural youth, the unemployed and those with lower levels of educational attainment (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Impact of Covid-19 on mental wellbeing**

*How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?*



Based on the survey data, it is also clear that the mental well-being of youth with disabilities was much more profoundly affected than the average. Of the 32 young people with disabilities in our sample, 91 per cent reported increased feelings of annoyance, 85 per cent reported feeling more hopeless, 84 per cent felt lonelier, a sense of hopelessness increased for 69 per cent, while 63 per cent reported problems sleeping.

**Although one in four young people felt the need for some kind of professional psychological support, they rarely used it, and the disabled youth expressed the need for and used such support more commonly than their peers with no disability.** The survey results reveal differential impact of the pandemic on mental health of youth

with disabilities compared to their peers with no disability. Only 7 per cent of young people used, or were referred to mental health services, with the proportion rising to 13 per cent among youth with disabilities. Services used range from individual counselling with psychologist, life coach, psychiatrist (private and public practice) to online support groups. While an even distribution of services was used, it is noticeable that youth with disabilities used remote support more than their peers with no disability, such as telephone based psychological support (6 vs 1 per cent) and internet-based chat and support groups (6 vs 2 per cent). The differential impact of the pandemic on youth with disabilities is also visible when looking at responses about the need for some type of psychological support. While one in four young people (24 per cent) felt the need for some

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kind of professional psychological support, this number rose to three-quarters among youth with disabilities. More specifically, the gap between youth as a whole and those with disabilities was most visible when it came to the need to be prescribed medication for emotional or behavioural problems (53 vs 5 per cent) and those needing counselling (37 vs 9 per cent).

Of those who felt the need for some kind of support but did not get it, 56 per cent opted to try to work out problems on their own, 17 per cent reported problems in getting to a service provider who could help them, while 13 per cent stated feeling uncomfortable to admit to having problems and a further 12 per cent revealed that they could simply not afford to get professional help. In terms of coping mechanisms that young people used to preserve their mental well-being most quoted were: doing more of the things that they enjoyed in life (30 per cent), exercising or taking up a sport (20 per cent), trying to stay well informed (19 per cent), trying to keep busy (18 per cent) or smoking cigarettes (12 per cent). However, those self-coping strategies were not always sufficient to help them to preserve their mental wellbeing, as admitted by one focus group participant who said: *“I feel like the pandemic has really made my mental wellbeing far worse. Even with a lot of exercise and doing things I enjoy; life feels very hard at the moment.”* (Male, 24)

**Infected young people in Albania reported good access to health care services.** A full 8 per cent of young people surveyed reported contracting Covid-19 (**Figure 8a**). All of them stated that they were able to access testing services, while 96 per cent reported receiving timely and efficient medical care once they were diagnosed the disease, compared to 4 per cent who did not (**Figure 8b**). Among those who contracted the virus, slightly more than one in ten (12 per cent) reported not having enough space to self-isolate from the rest of their household.

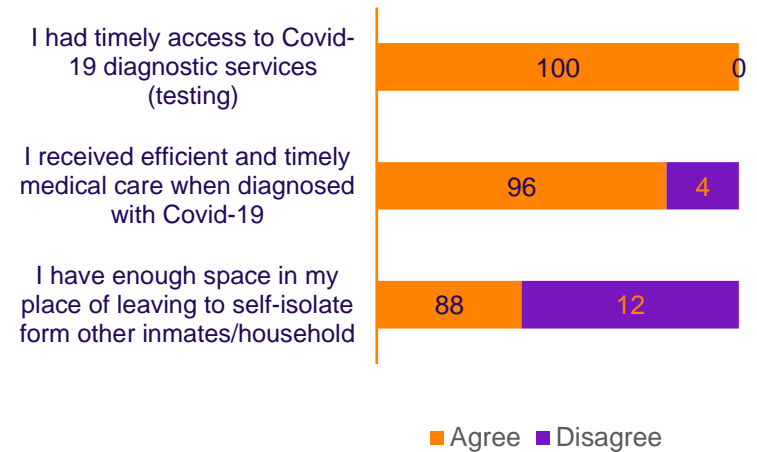
**Figure 8a: Covid-19 infection rate**

Have you had Covid-19? Unit: %



**Figure 8b: and access to health care services**

Please agree or disagree with the following statements?





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

“ *Covid-19 has tested the young people's experience of social cohesion. The core personal network remained resilient to the pandemic, as most young people reported their relationships with those closest to them improved during the pandemic. However, when it comes to their position vis-a-vis other groups in the society, most of them felt that youth had been stigmatized during the pandemic as irresponsible spreaders of the virus. By and large, young people think the pandemic increased the gap between the rich and the poor, and the younger and the older generations in the country. They think the pandemic generated more solidarity among people but exercising the solidarity through volunteering was rarely practiced by youth in Albania.*

## Backdrop

Albania is an ethnically homogenous country, particularly by Balkan standards, with around 83 per cent of the population being ethnically Albanian according to the 2011 population census.<sup>16</sup> Despite a patchwork of Muslims, Catholic and Orthodox

<sup>16</sup> For more complete data see: Wikipedia; [Demographics of Albania](#).

Christians, neither ethnicity nor religious differences are a major source of societal tensions.

However, over the last few years in particular, the country has been heavily politically polarised between supporters of the ruling Socialists of Prime Minister Edi Rama and their opponents, primarily gathered around the Democrats. Political tensions reached a high point in 2019, when the opposition organized a series of violent political protests in February, which culminated in a boycott of the local elections. These tensions remained elevated throughout the pandemic.

Aside from political tensions, Albania also saw student protests from December 2018 to February 2019, sparked by a government decision to increase the costs of studying. These protests seriously shook the Rama Government, leading it to backtrack on raising the costs of studying and forcing Rama reshuffle his government and replace – among others – the minister of education.

The onset of the coronavirus pandemic played into these tensions, which were reflected in a degree of polarisation over the Rama Government's handling of the pandemic. Tensions and frayed nerves reached boiling point at the end of the year, after police allegedly shot and killed a 25-year-old man for breaking a coronavirus curfew. Hundreds of protesters gathered on the streets of Tirana soon after, clashing with police and trying to storm the building of the Ministry of Interior.<sup>17</sup> The Albanian Government of Prime Minister Edi Rama also seems to have tried to use the public's preoccupation with the pandemic to sneak away with the demolition of the country's National Theatre in mid-May. Despite a long running dispute between government and activists, in the early hours of May 17, the National

<sup>17</sup> Anadolu Agency (2020). [Protests over police shooting of a young man in Albania](#); BBC (2020). [Albanian protesters burn Christmas trees over police killing](#).

## Covid Screenagers

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Albania

Theatre was demolished just as the country was emerging from a prolonged Covid-19 lockdown. The move sparked mass protests, in which police used a surprising level of brutality to disperse protesters.<sup>18</sup>

### Findings

**By and large, young people reported that their relationships with those closest to them improved during the pandemic.** Two out of three felt that their relationship with family members that they live with had improved over the course of the pandemic; by contrast, only 5 per cent felt that these relationships had deteriorated, while for the rest they remained more or less the same. Young women tended to report more often improved relationships with family than young men. Equally, just over a quarter of respondents (27 per cent) perceived that the relationship with their romantic partner had improved, while one in ten (9 per cent) felt that it had worsened.<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to note that there appears to be a positive correlation between those who felt their romantic relationships had improved and those in employment, as well as that women and those living in rural areas were more likely to report improved romantic relationships than males and urban youth. Friendships also seem to have grown stronger – almost half of respondents (48 per cent) reported that relationships with friends had improved, compared to just over one third (36 per cent) who felt they had stayed the same and 14 per cent who felt they had got worse. This time, it is young men who felt most consistently that relations with friends had improved during the pandemic.

**While personal relationships may have improved, two out of every three young people (65 per cent) felt that youth had been stigmatized during the Covid-19 pandemic as irresponsible spreaders of the virus.** Only 17 per cent of those surveyed disagreed with this in fact. Of the surveyed population of young people, only 8 per cent told us that they had contracted the virus. Of these, 75 per cent reported feeling supported, while other felt unease about it in society (25 per cent). Those did not share the information about the disease with friends (18 per cent), felt stigmatized (7 per cent), felt judged (8 per cent), or felt unsupported (4 per cent). One of the focus group participants with lived Covid-19 experience testified to the stigmatization of Covid-19 patients: *“I was the first one in my close surrounding diagnosed with Covid-19. I felt isolated, labelled, and blamed by the people surrounding me, even by health workers. Yes, in the end I successfully*

*recovered from the disease, but I am still being labelled as Covid-19.” (Male, 22).*

**Personal experiences of discrimination during the pandemic were infrequently reported by young people in Albania, apart from sub-groups who were already at risk of discrimination such as Roma and youth with disabilities.** Similarly, while 97 per cent of youth did not feel they had been discriminated based on their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender or age – 1 per cent did – the proportion of those who did feel discriminated rose to 16 per cent for Roma and 6 per cent for youth with disabilities. Furthermore, while the overwhelming majority of young people – 91 per cent - did not feel they had fallen victim to violence during the Covid-19 pandemic compared to 1 per cent who did, the picture looked significantly different for certain vulnerable groups. Fully one in four youth with disabilities reported falling victim to violence, along with 15 per cent of Roma. In this context, it is interesting to note that less than a third of young people surveyed (31 per cent) noticed increased discrimination towards specific groups during the pandemic. Of these, two in three (67 per cent) said that they believed discrimination towards the elderly increased, while 36 per cent observed increased discrimination towards people with disabilities.

**Gender based violence during the pandemic was rarely reported by young people in Albania.** Fully 97 per cent stated that they had neither fallen victim nor witnessed an increase in gender-based violence during the pandemic. Only 1 per cent reported that they had become victim to gender based violence and another 1 per cent reported witnessing it. However, these percentages rise for certain vulnerable groups – 11 per cent of Roma youth reported experiencing or witnessing gender-based violence, as did 10 per cent of youth with disabilities. Nevertheless, these numbers should be taken with quite a lot of caution. Previous research on violence against women and girls in Albania, published in early 2019, showed that 52.9 per cent of surveyed women had been subjected to gender-based violence in their life, while one in three (36.6 per cent) were experiencing it in the present.<sup>20</sup> It is highly unlikely that gender-based violence declined so drastically during the pandemic, and it might be that research on violence and especially on gender-based violence is a highly sensitive topic and requires specific research procedures other than survey in which respondents feel safe to share their experiences.

**In the eyes of young people, the coronavirus pandemic increased certain divisions and polarizations in Albanian society.** In particular, almost three quarters of young people believe that

<sup>18</sup> Balkan Insight (2020). [Protesters, police clash over theatre demolition in Tirana](#). Balkan Insight (2020). [Why a theatre demolition has sparked outrage in Albania](#).

<sup>19</sup> Almost half of respondents (46 per cent) felt this question was not applicable to them.

<sup>20</sup> For more details please see: 2018 National Population Survey – [Violence Against Women and Girls in Albania](#).

## Covid Screenagers

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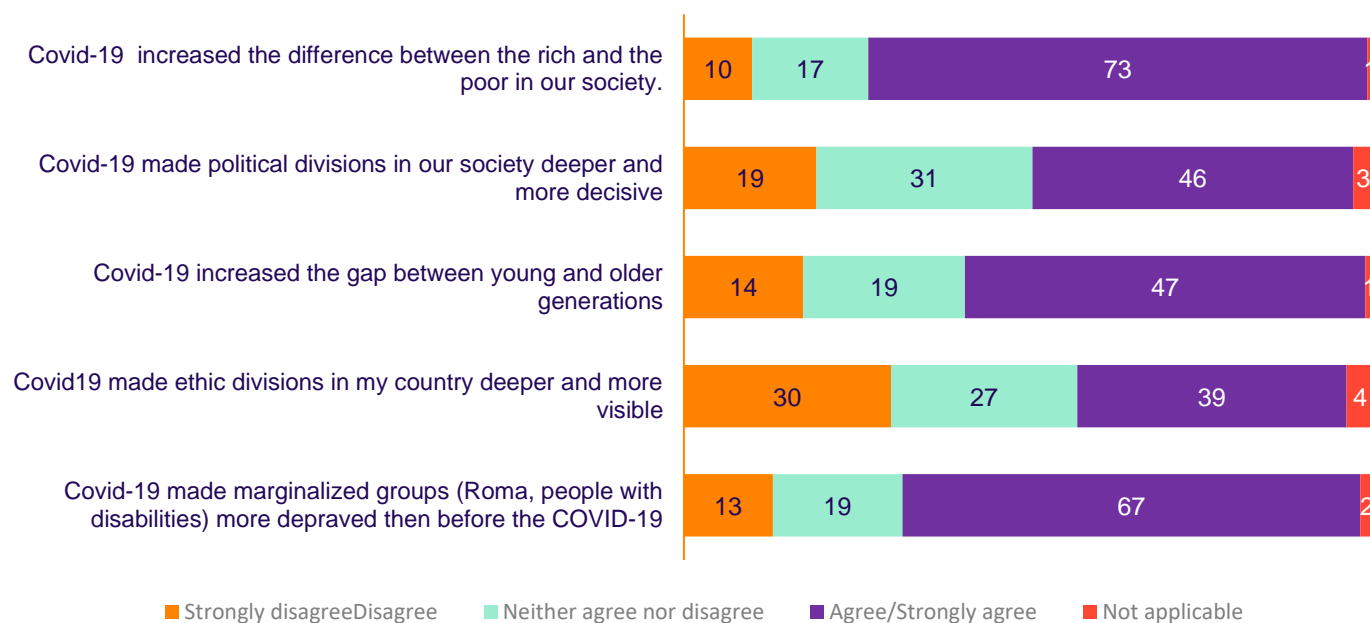
Albania

the pandemic increased the gap between rich and poor in the country (73 per cent), with youth who declared income drop being more perceptive of the increased gap than those with unchanged or increased income. Almost half (46 per cent) believe that the pandemic also sharpened political divisions, while two-thirds (67 per cent) saw an increased generational gap. When it comes to ethnic divisions, only 39 per cent believe that ethnic divisions increased during the pandemic, yet this perception is much higher among Roma – 48 per cent. Worryingly,

two-thirds of Albanian young people think that the Covid-19 pandemic made marginalized groups even more deprived than before (66 per cent). This self-perception of vulnerable groups regarding the increase in their own deprivation is even more startling – 84 per cent of Roma feel they became more deprived, along with 77 per cent of youth with disabilities and 71 per cent NEET (**Figure 9**).

### Figure 9: Impact of Covid-19 on society

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



**At the same time – perhaps slightly paradoxically – almost three out of four young people (72 per cent) felt that the pandemic had generated more solidarity among citizens of Albania.** Despite this, few young people reported having volunteered during the pandemic – just 5 per cent - with 46 per cent claiming there were no good opportunities, while 22 per cent expressed lack of interest in volunteering. Given the new challenges thrown up by the pandemic, it is interesting that – when asked directly if they felt that volunteering opportunities had declined during the pandemic – almost two-thirds of young people surveyed responded affirmatively, suggesting that opportunities to alleviate certain problems through creating space for volunteers to help were missed. That some potential at least existed to tap into the help of potential volunteers is underscored by the fact that a quarter of young people declared that they would volunteer to help people affected by Covid-19 given the chance, while a further 58 per cent responded with ‘maybe’.

**Given the global nature of the coronavirus pandemic young people felt more connected to the rest of the world over its duration.** Fully 55 per cent of young people expressed this sentiment, while only 19 per cent disagreed with it. Young women were more likely to feel this way compared to their male peers. In line with this, 53 per cent of young people expressed the desire to meet more people from other countries after the pandemic, with those with completed tertiary education expressing a greater desire to meet people from other countries than young people with completed secondary education and lower.

# TRUST IN AND PERCEPTIONS OF MEDIA COVERAGE DURING THE CRISIS

“ **Young people in Albania tended to rely on friends and family, as well as those who had experienced Covid-19 for information about the virus rather than the media, government, and health experts. Trust in media reporting regarding Covid-19 was low, as one in two young people did not trust any media when it came to reporting on Covid-19. Furthermore, young people in Albania negatively assessed media reporting about the pandemic as over-dramatizing, causing more panic, and not reporting the true extent of problems.**

## Backdrop

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, survey data from Albania showed that the country's citizens had the highest levels of trust in their media in Europe. Data published by the European Broadcasting Union in 2020 (gathered in November 2019) showed that 42 per cent of Albanian citizens had a 'high' degree of trust in the media, while a further 39 per cent had a 'medium' level of trust. By contrast, only 19 per cent expressed 'low or no trust' in the media. In particular, there was high trust in the printed press (77 per cent, the highest in Europe), radio (67 per cent) and television (66 per cent). A smaller – yet still remarkably high number of respondents – expressed trust in internet media (48 per cent expressed trust) and social networks (41 per cent).<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, no specific data on youth trust in media was available.

<sup>21</sup> European Broadcasting Union (2020). [Trust in Media 2020](#).

<sup>22</sup> UN Women Albania (2020). [The Impact of Covid-19 on Women's and Men's Lives and Livelihoods in Albania](#).

Currently available research on media use during the pandemic suggests that, while young women and men up to the age of 35 primarily relied on the internet to inform themselves regarding Covid-19, older people were much more likely to rely on more traditional media such as television or print to stay up to date on the pandemic.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, research conducted by the Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG) following the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic showed that, even in a region prone to believing in conspiracy theories, Albania had the highest proportion of those who declared that they believe a lot in almost any conspiracy theories (close to three fifths), regardless of age or education level. Most popular among conspiracy theorists in Albania was the idea that the Chinese government manufactured Covid-19 in a lab.<sup>23</sup>

## Findings

**As in many other countries of the region, young people tended to rely on friends and family, as well as those who had experienced Covid-19 for information about the virus rather than authorities such as doctors, health experts, or government officials and politicians.** In total, 44 per cent stated that they trusted those who had experienced Covid-19 as a source of information, while 42 per cent expressed trusting family and friends. By contrast, a mere one in a hundred stated that they trusted politicians or government officials as a source of information on the virus. Somewhat worryingly, only 18 per cent listed scientists/health experts and international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) as a trusted source.

**Trust in media reporting regarding Covid-19 was not particularly high.** Every other young person in Albania did not trust any media when it came to reporting on Covid-19, while 44 per cent stated that they trust some media. In general, young men and

<sup>23</sup> Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (2020). [The Suspicious Virus: Conspiracies and COVID-19 in the Balkans](#).

## Covid Screenagers

Socially distant, Digitally close

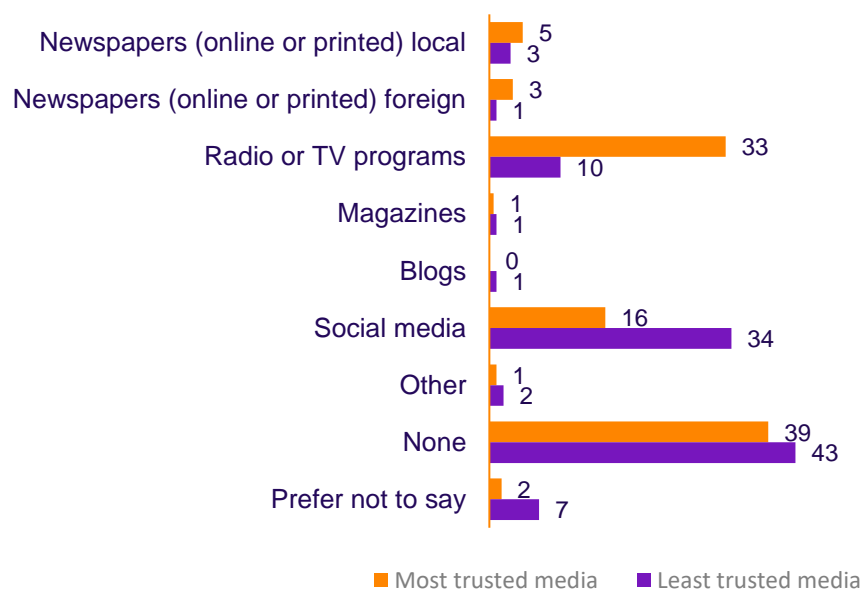
Albania

those with lower levels of educational attainment tended to have less trust in media reporting on the virus. When asked which media source they trust the most on Covid-19 related issues, young people had the highest level of trust in television and radio (33 per cent), social media (16 per cent) and newspapers (5 per cent, **Figure 10**). On the other hand, when asked which media they trusted the least, social media were top of the list (34 per cent). It was noticeable that young women tended to trust

television and radio more than young men (38 vs 29 per cent), while they also distrusted social media more (39 vs 29 per cent).

**Figure 10: Trust in media**

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

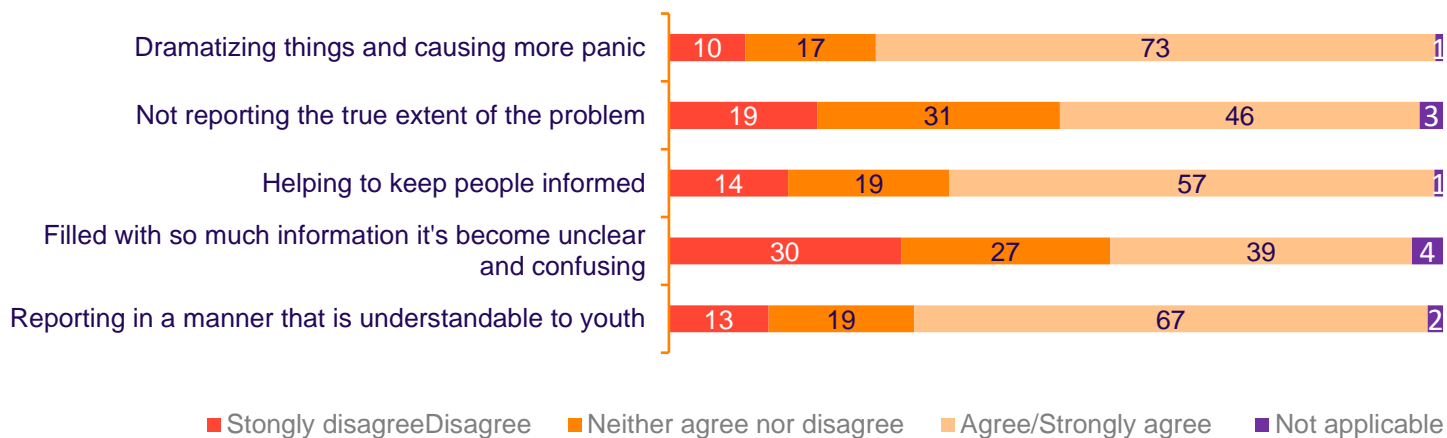


**Young people in Albania negatively assessed media reporting about the pandemic.** More than three-quarters of young people felt that media over-dramatized reporting on the pandemic and caused even more panic (78 per cent, **Figure 11**). A similar share also felt that media did not report the true extent of problems relating to Covid-19 (73 per cent). Given that one in five youth (19 per cent) listed

staying well informed as an important coping mechanism during the pandemic, it is perhaps worrying the 72 per cent felt that media reporting was filled with so much information as to become confusing. On the other hand, three out of five of those surveyed felt that the manner of reporting was understandable to young people.

**Figure 11: Assessment of media reporting**

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Unit: %



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

“ **More than two-thirds of young people surveyed stated that they supported the anti-Covid-19 measures imposed by the Albanian Government, with more than three-quarters claiming to have obeyed them by and large. However, more young people felt that the government did not adequately take into consideration and address their problems related to the pandemic, than those who felt the government did so.**

## Backdrop

With the confirmation of the first cases of Covid-19 on March 8<sup>th</sup>, the Albanian Government moved swiftly to impose lockdowns and measures aimed at imposing social distancing. Thus, places of mass gathering such as bars, cafes, restaurants, and nightclubs were ordered to close. A national curfew from the late afternoon until the morning was announced a week later, with durations being adjusted in line with the number of infections. The country also closed its borders on March 16<sup>th</sup>, with close ties to Italy – where the pandemic raged with full force – being a particular worry for Albanian authorities. In many urban areas, public transport was suspended or severely restricted, with restrictions on the use of personal cars and inter-city travel also being imposed, all with

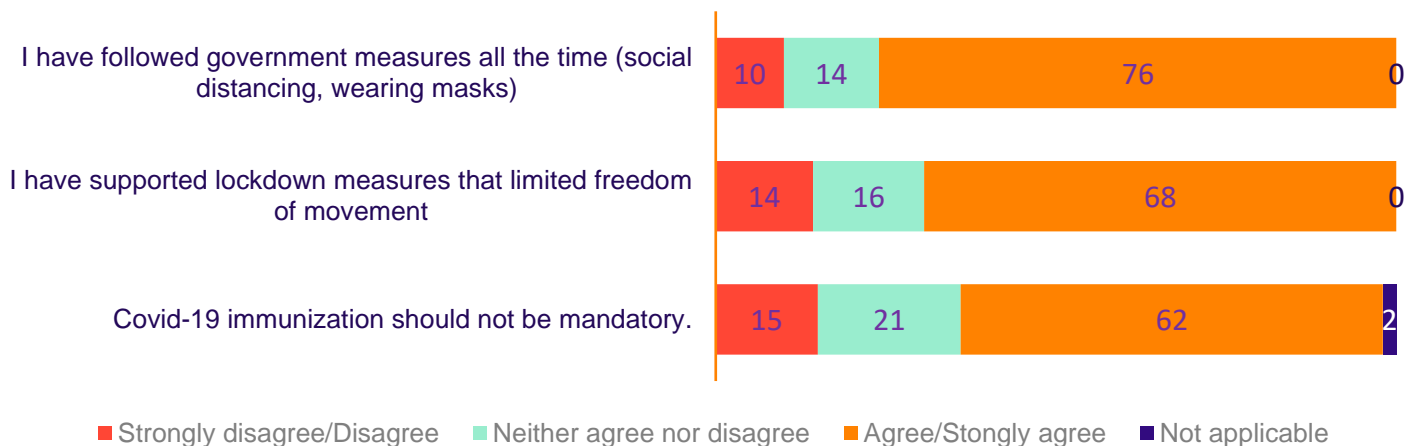
the aim of stemming the spread of infections. At the height of the pandemic, residents of some cities were only allowed outdoors for 90 minutes a day. Only towards the end of April did the authorities begin easing certain restrictions. Schools did not reopen for in-person classes until September, while University lectures remained online for most of the year.

## Findings

**An overwhelming majority of young people in Albania appear to have supported government measures intended to deal with the coronavirus pandemic.** More than two-thirds (68 per cent) supported government measures that limited the freedom of movement in the country, which were especially strict in March and April 2020, while just 16 per cent declared that they had been opposed to them (**Figure 12**). Young women were, on the whole, more likely to support restrictions on movement than men. Regardless of whether they supported measures to control the spread of the virus (such as wearing face masks, observing social distancing, etc.), 76 per cent of young people surveyed claimed to have respected them, whereas only 10 per cent admitted to not complying with them. Once again, young women, as well as young people with a higher level of educational attainment and those living in rural areas, were more likely to confirm that they had respected government imposed anti-Covid-19 measures. As in most other parts of the region, there is an evident opposition to mandatory immunization – six out of ten young people (61 per cent) felt that immunization should not be mandatory.

**Figure 12: Attitudes towards government’s crisis response**

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Unit=%

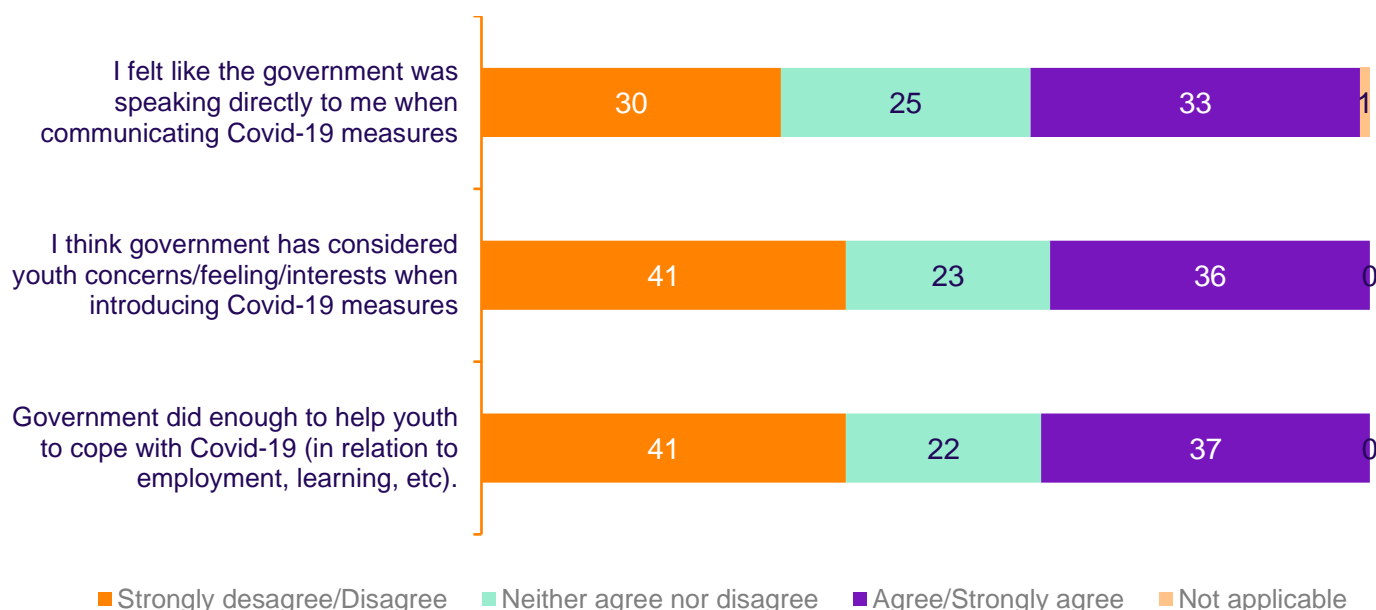


**Most young people in Albania believe that government measures intended to stem the spread of the coronavirus have been adequate and effective.** A total of 53 per cent of youth saw the government’s anti-Covid-19 measures as being effective at stemming the spread of the virus throughout the pandemic. Equally, 56 per cent felt that the measures imposed were adequate and proportional to the situation, with six out of ten (61 per cent) declaring that messaging had been clear and consistent throughout the pandemic. Slightly less than half of those surveyed (49 per cent) felt that government policy had been informed by science.

More young people felt that their problems and concerns were not considered by the government during the pandemic than those that feel they were. In total, 40 per cent declared that they felt the government had not given enough consideration to youth concerns and feelings when introducing anti-Covid-19 measures, while 36 per cent felt that it did (Figure 13). Slightly more (41 per cent) feel that the government did not do enough to help young people cope with Covid-19 (in relation to problems relating to employment, learning, etc.), while 37 per cent believe that enough was done. On the other hand, when it comes to communication more (43 per cent) agreed with the statement that they ‘felt like the government was speaking directly to me when communicating Covid-19 measures’ than those that did not agree with this (30 per cent).

**Figure 13: Government measures and youth**

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



# FUTURE OUTLOOK: HOPES, CONCERNS, AND ASPIRATIONS

“ Looking ahead, far more young people expect Covid-19 to have a negative impact on their future (44%) than believe that it will have a positive impact (27%). A closer look at the responses of young people clearly shows that their concerns are primarily related to the possible negative impact of Covid-19 on their career and income prospects, as well as labor market entry prospects. Three in five young people would like to migrate abroad for work purposes, with 48% saying that the Albanian Government’s response to the pandemic had made them even more keen to leave the country.

Young people in Albania are more negative than positive about the long-term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their future. By far the biggest group – 44 per cent - foresee a negative impact, while 25 per cent expect a neutral impact. At the same time, a remarkable 27 per cent believe that the pandemic could have a positive impact on their future. On balance, young people in the 25-29 age range were more likely to express negative expectations regarding Covid-19’s impact on their future than younger cohort (49 vs 41 per cent). These findings stand in sharp contrast to the FES study for 2018/2019, which found 87 per cent of young people in Albania feeling very optimistic about the future, compared to just 2 per cent who had negative expectations and 9 per cent who expected their fortune to be more or less the same in the future.<sup>24</sup>. Our focus group participants mainly echoed negative expectations about the pandemic’s impact on their own future, with some of them highlighting it already had a major impact on their future such as the postponing tertiary education and plans to migrate abroad.

**Youth in Albania are most worried about the pandemic impact on their career and income prospects.** Asked about how they expect Covid-19 to impact their future over the next three years, one in two (52 per cent) expected a negative impact on their career and labour market entry prospects (48 per cent), while somewhat less – 43 per cent - also expected it to have a negative impact on their income (**Figure 14**). Young people also had negative expectations regarding opportunities to travel abroad – 41 per cent expect this to be affected negatively by the pandemic. However, Albanian youth were also remarkably positive in their perceptions of the pandemic’s impact on some other spheres of life. Thus, more than two-thirds (68 per cent) expressed the belief that the pandemic would improve their relationships with others, while three out of five believed that it would affect family planning positively (62 per cent), as well as their knowledge and skills (61 per cent). Perhaps somewhat surprisingly – given

<sup>24</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2019). [Youth Study Albania 2018/2019](#).



## Covid Screenagers

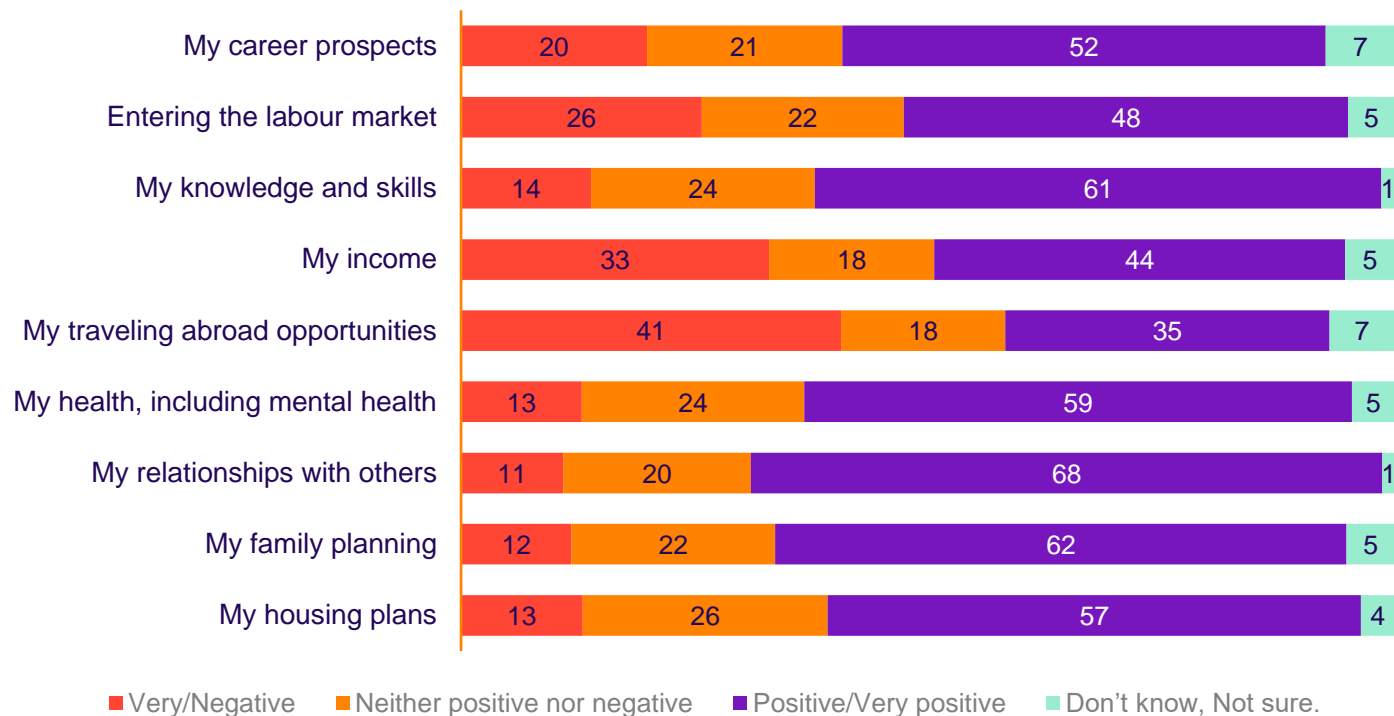
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Albania

the results regarding the impact of Covid-19 on mental well-being – 58 per cent of those surveyed declared that they expected the pandemic to have a positive impact on their health, including mental health.

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

When you think about impact of Covid-19 pandemic on your future over the next 3 years, what are your expectations of pandemic impact on...? Unit:%



**Vulnerable groups such as Roma, youth with disabilities and NEET are less pessimistic about the potential impact of Covid19 on their career prospects and income.** Whereas 52 per cent of the surveyed population as a whole think that Covid-19 will have a negative impact on their career prospects, only 24 per cent of Roma have such expectations, rising to 26 per cent with NEET and 41 per cent among youth with disabilities. Similarly, while 43 per cent of young people as a whole anticipate a negative impact on their income, only a third (31 per cent) of Roma youth have such negative expectations, along with 36 per cent of NEET, rising to 41 per cent among youth with disabilities. While 48 per cent of youth expect a negative impact on their labour market entry prospects, only a quarter of Roma (24 per cent) and NEET (26 per cent) have such negative expectations, along with 41 per cent of youth with disabilities. These below average negative expectations are likely a result that these groups – particularly Roman and NEET – already had very low expectations regarding income and career prospects even before the onset of Covid-19.

**As in many other countries of the Balkans, a large proportion of young people would like to migrate from Albania, either to study or – more often – to work.** One in three young people (34 per cent) would like to leave the country and study abroad as soon as the pandemic is over. This number rises to three in five (58 per cent) when it comes to migrating abroad for work. Young men and unemployed youth were most keen to migrate for work. Tellingly, almost half of respondents (48 per cent) declared that the response of their country's government to the pandemic had made them even more keen to leave the country and live somewhere else. These findings confirm migration trends in Albania, as the number of young people who left the country in the last decade reached 140,390, with demands to leave the country during 2019 increased significantly by 24 per cent.<sup>25</sup>

**As a result of the pandemic, Albanian youth seem to expect a more digitalized world.** Almost two-thirds of them think they will use more digital services in the future (60 per cent), while nearly half of respondents think they will interact more with other people online (48 per cent). Furthermore, nearly one in three young people think that they will use more

<sup>25</sup> Partner Albania for Change and Development. (2021). [The impact of COVID-19 on youth employment in Albania.](#)

## Covid Screenagers

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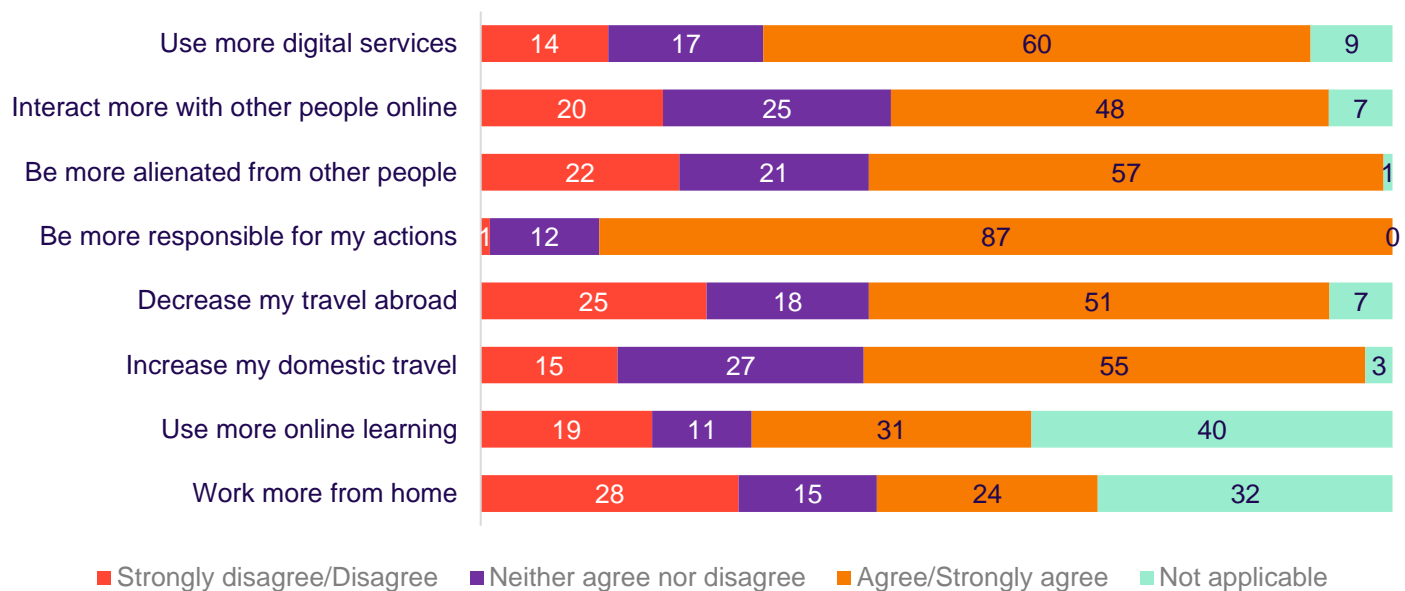
Albania

online learning in the future (31 per cent). Yet the perception of the digital future is not all that rosy – more than half of Albanian youth think that they will be more alienated from other people (57 per cent). Back in the ‘off-line’ world, youth expect increased domestic travel (55 per cent) and decreased international travel (51 per cent). Almost the same proportion of youth expect that in the future they will

work from home and go to the workplace (24 per cent). On a very positive note, nearly one in ten young people think they will be more responsible regarding their actions in the future because of the Covid-19 pandemic (87 per cent, **Figure 15**).

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

*How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Covid-19 impact on your future behaviours/practices compared to period before Covid-19? In the future, due to the pandemic I will...? Unit: %*



**In line with the concerns of young people about their career and income prospects in the post-Covid-19 world, almost nine out of ten young people believe that the top priority of governments/donor’s investments in the future should be fighting unemployment in the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic.** Reflecting the lower concerns of vulnerable groups in this regard, it is notable that only 53 per cent of youth with disabilities saw this as the most urgent priority post-Covid-19, along with 78 per cent of Roma. Just over two-thirds of young people (68 per cent) also listed investment in healthcare as one of the most urgent future priorities, with youth with disabilities more commonly seeing this as a burning priority (85 per cent). Roughly one in two youth (55 per cent) saw increasing social benefits for those whose situation has been worsened by the pandemic as another key priority. Vulnerable groups saw this as a much more pressing need – 81 per cent of youth with disabilities listed this as a key priority, along with 73 per cent of Roma and 69 per cent of NEET.

**Decreased corruption in the employment processes rather than subsidized employment would benefit the young people the most to deal with the adverse pandemic impacts.** Youth in

Albania picked decreased corruption in the employment process as the most beneficial policy measure in the post-Covid recovery period (69 per cent). Although the recent study reported that young people are becoming more comfortable with using connections to get jobs<sup>26</sup>, this result indicates that young people might get tired of unfair and corrupted employment practices in the country. To further illustrate this, decreased corruption in the employment process fared better than subsidized employment even among those who lost their jobs due to and during the pandemic (46 vs 44 per cent). As closely second most beneficial measure, youth picked the increased subsidies for companies providing youth with opportunities for entering work (67 per cent). These are followed by the improved financial assistance to young people in need (64 per cent, **Figure 16**). One in two also wanted the government to intervene to increase the number of opportunities for paid internships (48 per cent). For two-fifths of Albanian youth improving access to finance for business start-ups and improved provision of skills for employability were also important priorities (39 per cent each).

However, important differences are visible among different segments of the youth population. Rural

<sup>26</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2019); [Youth Study Albania 2018/2019](#).

## Covid Screenagers

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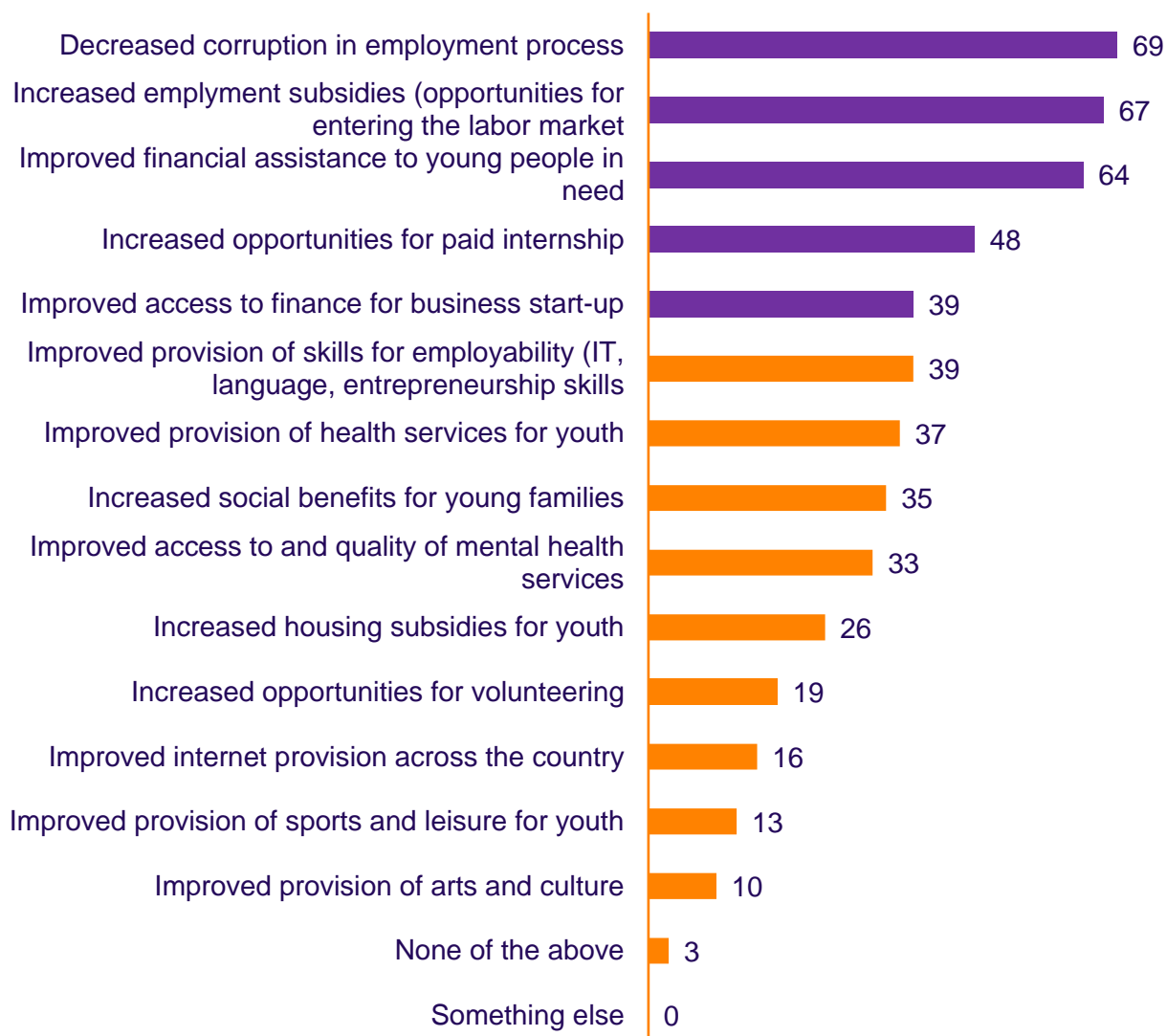
Albania

youth saw the provision of increased finance for business start-ups as beneficial more than urban youth (63 vs 39 per cent). Among more vulnerable segments of the population, youth with disabilities and NEET saw the provision of better health services to youth as the most pressing priority (81 per cent),

as well as increased financial assistance (75 per cent). The latter was also the top priority for Roma youth (72 per cent), along with increased social benefits for young families (55 per cent).

### Figure 16: Youth-specific measures

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



# GREEN MATTERS

**80%**

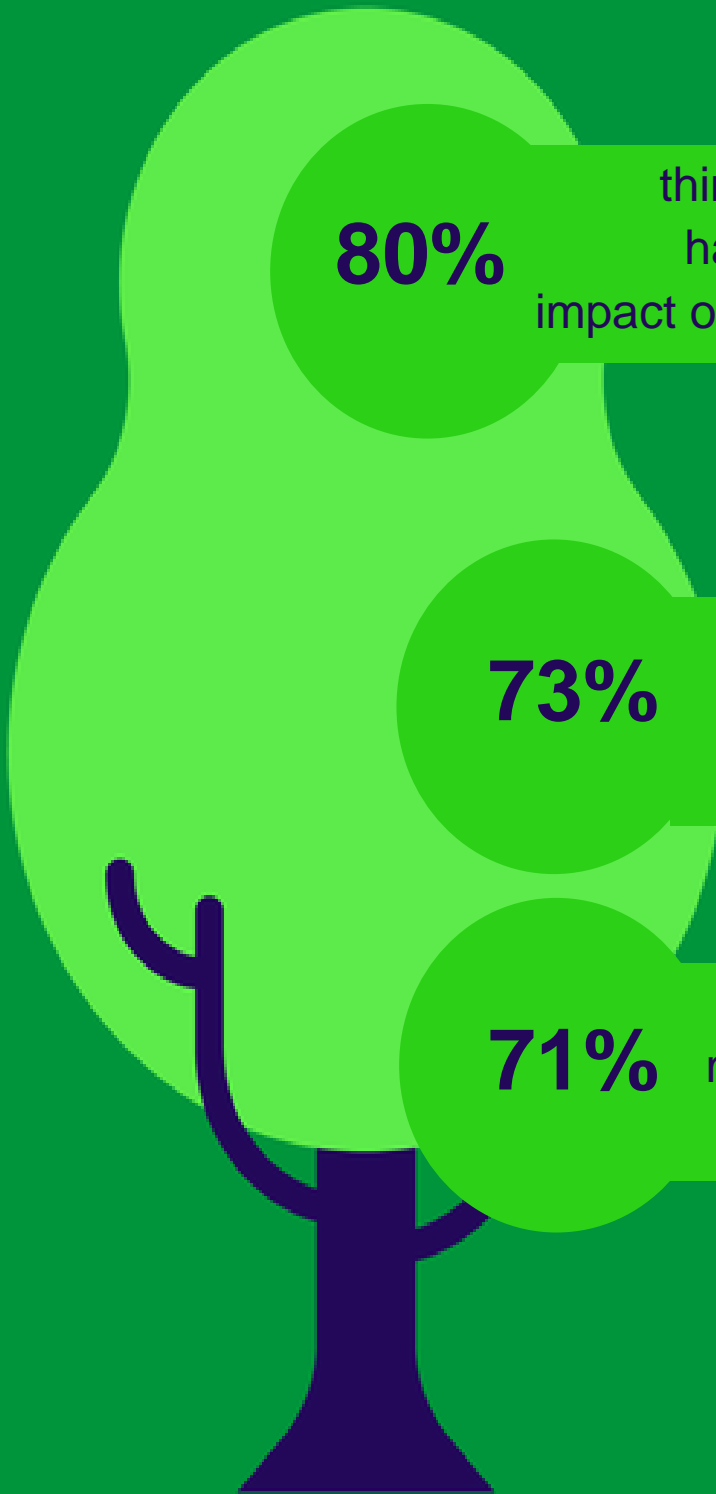
think that the Covid-19 outbreak has had a substantial positive impact on many aspects of the environment

**73%**

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

**71%**

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



The background is a dark blue gradient. In the top left, there is a solid orange circle and a thick orange line that curves downwards. In the bottom left, there are several overlapping organic shapes: a large orange circle, a red circle, and a white circle, all partially cut off by the edge. A thick white line also curves through these shapes. The text is positioned in the upper right quadrant.

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