

# ENYA RECOMMENDATIONS

Let's Talk Young, Let's Talk about the  
impact of COVID-19 on Children's  
Rights

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SEPTEMBER 2021 // EUROPEAN NETWORK OF YOUNG ADVISORS



European Network of Ombudspersons for Children

# FOREWORD

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Children and young people all over the world have been impacted, in some way or other, by the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of the work carried out by the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC), the young people who participated in the ENYA 2021 project, both at national level and at European level, discussed the impact that the COVID-19 measures have had on their rights.

The young people identified many challenges and have put forward many recommendations. However, something that was really emphasized by the young people was that most of the time they were not consulted in any way when measures to control the pandemic were being implemented, despite the fact that according to Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, young people have the right to express their views on all matters that concern them and such views should be given due weight. It should be ensured that the recommendations put forward by the young people are incorporated into the work carried out by children's rights advocates.

**We, the ENYA young advisors, urge all institutions including national/regional Ombudspersons and Commissioners for Children; Governments; the European Union; the Council of Europe and all other stakeholders to follow-up on these recommendations so as to ensure that children's rights are guaranteed even during a global pandemic.**

## ENYA 2021 HELP WITH THE BAGGAGE



## INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has brought many challenges for all, including children, particularly those living in vulnerable situations and unable to access services. Children were and are still involved very little, if at all, in discussions concerning policies and decisions regarding COVID-19 while all aspects of their lives are being/have been profoundly affected by the pandemic. Therefore, the aim of the ENYA 2021 project was to facilitate discussions with young people from all over Europe so as to ensure that their ideas and experiences are brought to the attention of the relevant authorities.

This year, ENYA saw one of the largest numbers of ENOC members that took part in this initiative. Young people from 17 countries/regions participated in discussions about the impact of COVID-19 on children's rights.

Participating Countries/regions: Albania, Andalusia/Spain, Basque Country/Spain, Bulgaria, Catalonia/Spain; France, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Malta, Montenegro, Northern Ireland/UK, Norway, Scotland/UK, Slovakia, Ukraine, Wales/UK

The office of the Commissioner for Children in Malta was the ENYA General Coordinator and provided guidance and support throughout the whole process. Between March and June, the ENYA coordinators facilitated and organized a number of meetings and activities with groups of young people at national/regional levels. Most meetings were held online due to the COVID-19 situation however, some countries/regions were able to hold face-to-face meetings.

The main aim of these meetings was to create a better understanding of which rights, as enshrined in the UNCRC, were impacted the most. Particular emphasis was placed on four main topics: **education; health (both mental and physical health); child poverty; violence and abuse**. The young people were asked to focus on at least two of the main topics. They were also encouraged to explore other topics which they felt were important to them. Following the discussions, the young people were asked to provide recommendations regarding how the wellbeing of children and young people can be safeguarded and how their rights should be respected in emergency situations like the COVID-19 pandemic.

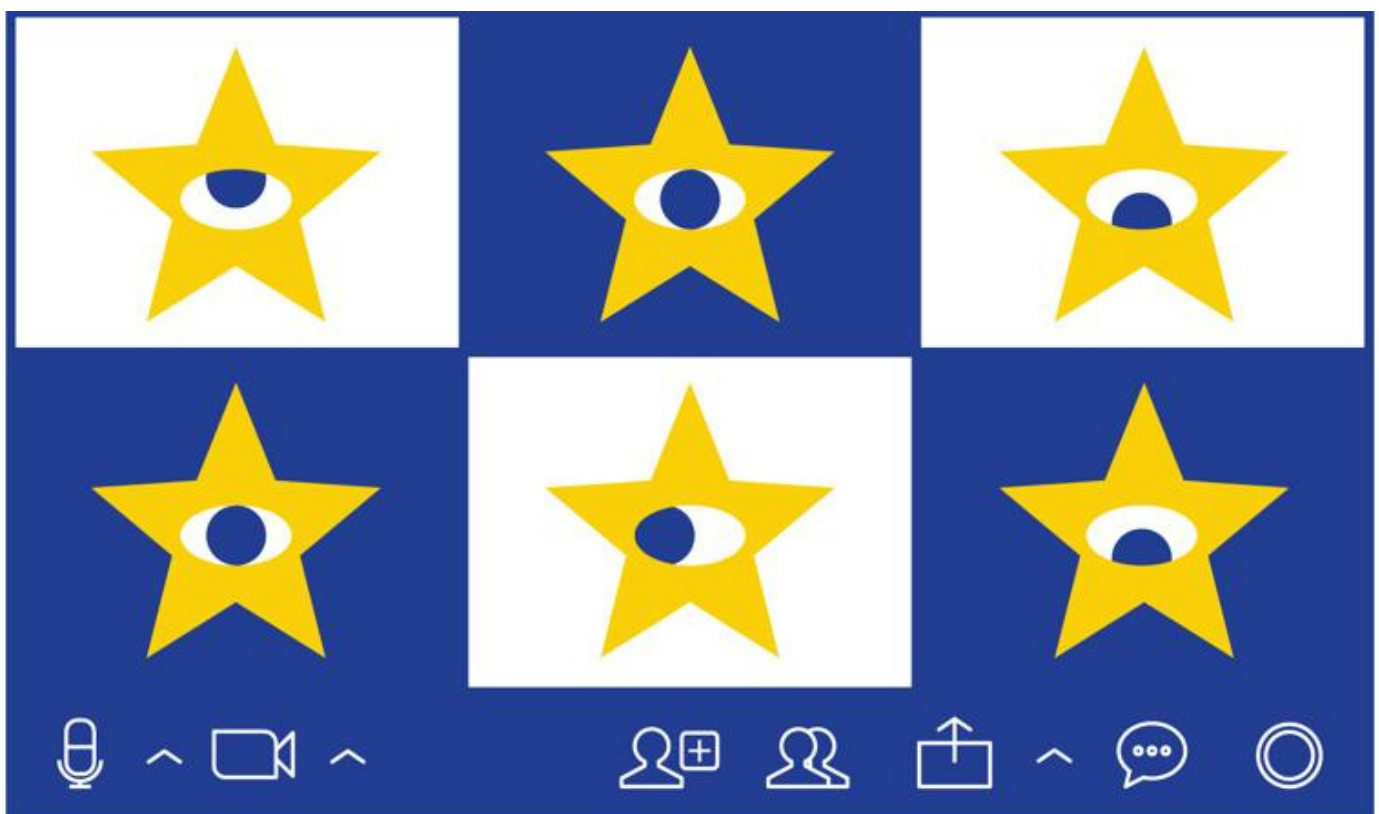
## ENYA FORUM



For the second time, the ENYA forum was held online on the 1st and 2nd of July 2021. The Forum was hosted by the Office of the Commissioner for Children in Malta as the General ENYA Coordinator. 33 young people between the ages of 12 and 18 and from 17 countries/regions attended the forum. The young people were supported by their coordinators who also facilitated various sessions over the two days. The ENOC Secretariat and several Ombudspersons and Commissioners for Children also joined the event.

Each country/region was asked to submit their group's recommendations prior to the ENYA Forum so that they could be compiled and presented in one document. Considering the significant impact COVID-19 has had on young people, a large number of recommendations were received. The young people provided recommendations on all of the main topics as well as on additional topics including: **Participation; Play and Leisure; Family; Information; and the Digital Environment.**

The Forum served as a platform for the young people to get to know each other as well as to share ideas and experiences. During the two days various interactive and fun activities were organized, such as a virtual escape game, a music workshop, or a virtual tour of Malta's Hypogeum. The young people were divided into different groups so as to discuss and vote for the different recommendations, using the Padlet software for brainstorming





# RECOMMENDATIONS

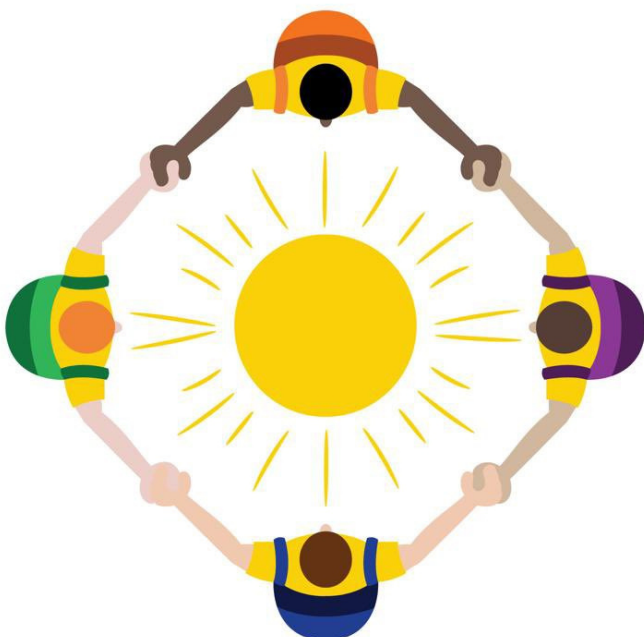
## EDUCATION

1. Before deciding to switch to remote learning, it needs to be ensured that all children have internet access and the right equipment to participate. Where needed, supplies, amenities and materials to create an adequate and enabling learning environment at home should be provided too.
2. Special assistance and support should be provided for children that need it. This could be due to learning difficulties, lack of a support system at home, children in care, or other disadvantages children may face with their studies.
3. Online lessons should be recorded so that they can be watched back by students who have missed a class.
4. Training should be provided to educators on remote teaching. Training should include how the technological tools work; how to provide emotional support to children; how to effectively engage with students online.

5. A debate should be opened on the gaps in the education system revealed by the pandemic, with the aim of creating a new model corresponding to children's realities and interests. This new model should include: more open air activities, a stronger focus on students' autonomy and on their personal development and independent thinking, a wider range of methods, materials and activities and more cultural activities.

6. The focus of the educational system in general should be shifted from just focusing on academic achievement, to enhancing participation and expression and allowing some free time. The pandemic crisis highlighted further this systemic deficiency.

**ENYA 2021  
IN-PERSON SCHOOLS AND THEIR VITAL ROLE  
IN CHARACTER BUILDING**



7. Efforts need to be made for the improvement of teacher - child/student relationships, teachers should listen to children and create a climate conducive to dialogue and consequently conducive to learning. Such relationships should be co-operative for the achievement of common objectives particularly the prevention of any form of violation of their rights, even in this unusual pandemic period.

8. There should be standardisation of remote learning and ensuring it is appropriate for all learning styles and backgrounds. Therefore, the Government should adopt a unified policy for schools in this regard.

9. Governments should introduce mandatory training for teachers and other educators to have the skills and knowledge to recognise and appropriately deal with a child who is facing mental and physical challenges.

## **HEALTH**

1. Ensure frequent and clear information is provided by the authorities during the pandemic presenting a realistic view of the struggles felt by young people both educationally and personally by including a panel of young people from different backgrounds to portray a more sensitive and accurate image of young people in the future.

2. Inform, now more than ever, students about Mental Health in schools, to know how to detect and interpret how they feel, learn how to relax and deal with stress.

3. Governments should give priority to letting young people live their lives as normal as possible.

4. Create conditions to ensure the uninterrupted receipt by children and young people with disabilities of the necessary medical and rehabilitation services and reduce the waiting times for all diagnoses and procedures pre COVID-19.

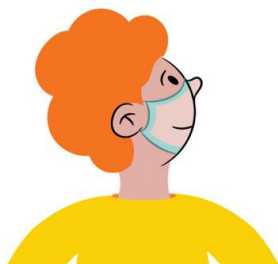
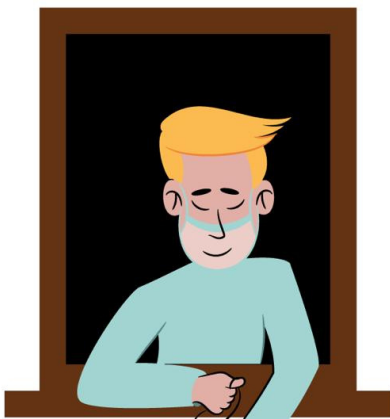
**ENYA 2021  
TAKING CARE OF YOUR MENTAL HEALTH**



5. Governments and local authorities must collect young people's views when changes are to be made in rules for infection control and about what health services should be available for young people.
6. More resources and financial investment are necessary to ensure access to a network of professionals and specialised mental health services and GPs for children and young people.
7. Encourage and promote secure access to specialised mental health services through a face-to-face personal approach or online consultations (as a minimum), allowing children and young people to choose their preferred option.
8. Provide all children, especially children in vulnerable situations (Roma and migrant children including unaccompanied minors, children with disability, children without parental care) accurate, and child-friendly information in connection with the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

## ENYA 2021

### INEQUALITY AND COVID-19



## POVERTY

1. Families that have children and that live in difficult socio-economic conditions, should be identified in order to support them with food packages, disinfectant packages, masks, medicines and other personal hygiene materials.
2. Provide assistance and support to families in which parents have remained unemployed due to consequences of the pandemic.
3. Measures should be taken to ensure that all children live in suitable environments especially homeless children and children in care. Homeless children need to be identified and supported as they have been greatly affected and most exposed to COVID-19 infection.

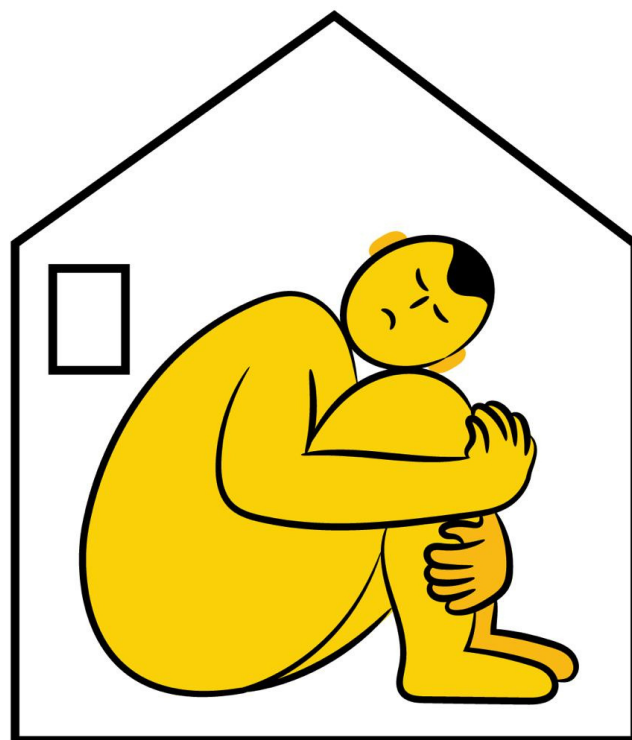


1. Increase social benefits and assistance to large families, children in care, children with disabilities, Roma children in order to overcome the negative consequences caused by restrictive measures introduced to prevent the spread of coronavirus disease.
2. Policy makers should support working parents and intensify monitoring to avoid violations and to ensure that their rights are respected. Special protection should be provided to parents facing the danger of discrimination and exploitation.
3. Preschool and other day care services should increase and flexible schedules should be provided to working parents (or even help at home).
4. Ensure that free access to education is guaranteed.
5. Adult vocational training should be provided to all parents seeking opportunities in the labour market.

## **VIOLENCE AND ABUSE**

1. School psychologists should be involved in a dedicated class for supporting students' wellbeing and emotional intelligence. Such classes will also empower children, help them tackle feelings of guilt and help to identify violations.
2. Support for families affected by domestic violence, including emotional support as well as police support, and somewhere for families to go if they are abused. Vulnerable families should have checks, when needed, from social services and mental health services to provide support.
3. Police need to protect children and young people in a public emergency, rather than seeing them as a problem. Police should be provided with training on how to communicate effectively with children and young people.

### **ENYA 2021 WHEN HOME IS NOT A SAFE SPACE**



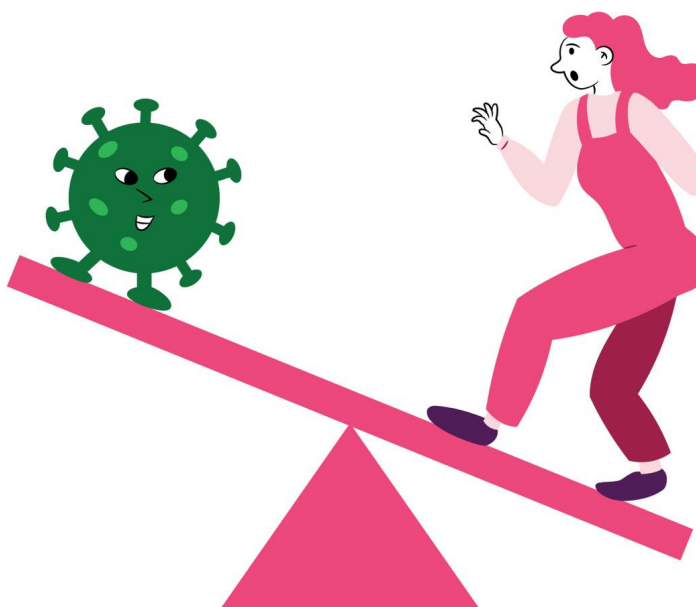
4. There should be an increase in training for teachers and other professionals working in schools on how to prevent situations of violence against children, how to identify situations of abuse (including domestic abuse) and how to introduce an appropriate response.
5. Governments should properly research the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable children and young people.
6. Whilst various support services should be offered to children who suffer violence, there should also be support services for children who commit violence. Such services should be provided at school, through health care and local communities.
7. Awareness should be raised to prevent violence and internet abuse during the development of the learning process on online platforms. Agreements should be made with social network companies for the removal of abusive photos and videos.
8. There should be a strong advertising campaign through social media (especially on Instagram) to create awareness about national helplines for children that aim at providing anonymity, confidentiality and emotional support to children who are victims of abuse.

### **ENYA 2021**

#### **LETTING YOUNG PEOPLE LIVE THEIR LIFE**

#### **PLAY AND LEISURE**

1. Common leisure areas for sports activities should be protected and promoted. Children's sports and activities should be kept open whenever possible.
2. Funding for youth clubs and other diversionary activities needs to be prioritised.
3. Authorities must take into account children's social and leisure needs when implementing measures to contain the pandemic. Adapting formats (hybrid formats) and spaces to the pandemic situation should be given priority over stopping activities.



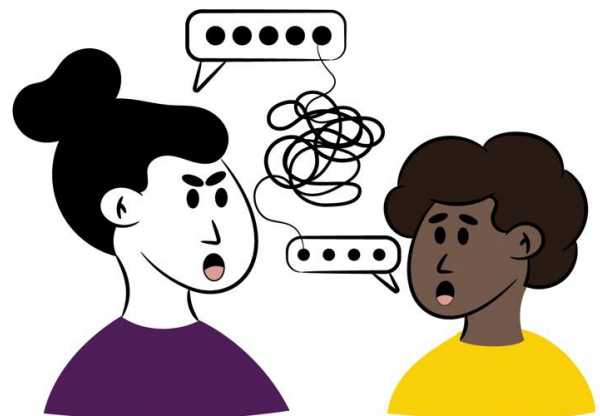
## **PARTICIPATION**

1. The Ministry for Education should set up a specially trained committee to visit schools and listen to children's views in all aspects of school life.
2. Young people must be involved when new COVID restrictions are being decided. Particularly regarding the re-opening of schools, exams and support services for mental health.
3. Child participation should be part of the curriculum and school protocols should be more oriented towards child participation.

## **INFORMATION**

1. More information about COVID-19 needs to be given to children, such information should be provided in child-friendly language. Information should be straightforward and from a trusted source.
2. When Government is providing information, it should not stigmatise young people and make them feel like they are a problem.
3. Decision-makers need to communicate clearly and effectively and provide children with the information they need in a clear form. Only accurate information that won't change should be given out. Sudden unclear changes in decisions may have an effect on children's wellbeing, particularly with regards to exams.

### **ENYA 2021 BETTER COMMUNICATION FROM AUTHORITIES**



## **THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT**

1. Virtual spaces, including online fora, should be created for children and young people to unite as a group and help each other with homework and to deal with issues of common and current interest, with courses and meetings that attract children more.

2. Awareness raising on dealing with online safety for children should act as prevention and create a full understanding amongst minors and their parents/guardians. Children and parents should be made aware of the dangers that exist online such as cyber-bullying and how to address any dangers encountered.

3. Awareness raising campaigns should be carried out in schools, for students and teachers, on the digital environment. Such campaigns should involve journalists, streamers, musicians to stimulate learning even more.

## FAMILY

1. Childcare and respite such as drop-in centres or community activities should be available to support families who need it and families with parents who work away.

2. A timeline should be provided and international cooperation to ensure families who live in other countries are allowed to see each other.

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**ENYA 2021 - Extra Topics Group 1**  
Recommendations

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**Participation**

- Children should be consulted on suggested measures, this could be done via polls, digital voting and questionnaires. Children and young people's point of view should be actively collected. Once collected, adults should listen and take action in good time. Children should also be informed of what has been done and why.
- Adults tend to only listen to children on what they agree with and children feel blocked and censored. Children should be consulted on all decisions that affect them. Parents

**General**

- Children and young people shouldn't be seen as scapegoats and seen as causing the pandemic – this causes great frustration because children and young people can't make decisions about how things happen so the frustrations can boil over to anti-social behaviour.
- Children of different ages have different needs and these should be addressed. Young children began to be able to go out, but teenagers were not, when it is a stage of life with a lot of energy and desire to do things.

**Play and Leisure**

- New community spaces should be opened dedicated to the practice of new hobbies.
- Financial aid targeted at cultural activities and tourism should be granted to families so as to contribute to family leisure and economic recovery.
- Governments must give priority to measures targeted at young people's social lives from now on. There needs to

**Information**

- More information about COVID-19 needs to be given to children, such information should be provided in child-friendly language. Information should be straightforward and from a trusted source.
- Decision-makers need to communicate clearly and effectively and provide children with the information they need in a clear form. Only accurate information that won't change should be given out. Sudden unclear changes in decisions may have an effect on children's wellbeing, particularly with regards to

**Digital Environment**

- The quality of digital platforms and tools in schools needs to be improved so as to create 'connected learning environments'.
- Virtual spaces should be created for children and young people to unite as a group and help each other with homework and to deal with issues of common and current interest, with courses and meetings that attract children more.

Volodymyr Anpilogov, ...  
Elisa-Malta  
Isidora Jovičević Pod...  
Nikola (Slovakia)

# CONCLUSION

As stated by the young people themselves, 'children and young people shouldn't be seen as scapegoats and seen as causing the pandemic – this causes great frustration. Children and young people can't make decisions about how things happen so the frustrations can boil over to anti-social behaviour'. Children's rights should still be guaranteed during a pandemic and children should still have access to services including to possibility to apply for identity papers.

Some of the young people who attended the ENYA Forum will present these recommendations at the ENOC Annual Conference taking place on the 27th and the 28th of September 2021. Some of the recommendations have also been incorporated in the ENOC statement which will be adopted by ENOC members on the 29th of September.

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