

Building students' resilience and prioritising their well-being requires a joint effort from the whole community. This has become even clearer in the last 2 years when the COVID-19 pandemic forced learners and teachers to adapt to new educational challenges, highlighted the importance of well-being and resilience and revealed the need of efforts across the EU to ensure that no one is left behind.

1.5 Effect of COVID

The COVID-19 pandemic, which led to physical school closures in many countries worldwide coupled with a move to online teaching, considerably reduced the intensity of students' social interactions with their peers and teachers. This reduction in social contact due to the pandemic is expected to be particularly detrimental to vulnerable students (OECD, 2020)⁷⁷.

Harmonised and internationally comparable sources allowing to analyse what happened to children's well-being during the pandemic across the EU are still rare. This chapter sets out to draw conclusions from several surveys undertaken to clarify the picture: the "Kids' Digital lives in COVID-19 Times" (KiDiCoTi) survey, coordinated by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre⁷⁸, the COVID-19 International Student Well-being Study (C19 ISWS), a global survey on "Student perceptions of remote learning" and an online survey conducted by the European Commission in 2020 on how Vocational Education and Training (VET) ensured continuity of learning and teaching during the COVID-19 lockdown measures⁷⁹.

1.5.1 Well-being during COVID-19: evidence from the KiDiCoTi Survey

The project on "Kids' Digital lives in COVID-19 Times" (KiDiCoTi) aimed to understand how children at the end of primary education and in secondary education (10-18 year-olds) and their parents engaged with digital technologies while staying at home and how these experiences may have affected children's online safety and overall family well-being. The survey was carried out during the COVID-19 lockdown in spring 2020 and involved nine EU Member States (Austria, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Spain), plus Switzerland and Norway.

In these 11 countries, Figure 28 shows, very few students continued with regular face-to-face schooling during the lockdown (maximum 1%), while between 1 and 4% of the children did not receive any education. Depending on the intensity of the lockdown and the preparedness of the system, other countries moved education for most of the respondents to remote education totally⁸⁰ or partially⁸¹. On the effects physical school closures had on schoolwork (as a sum of school hours and homework), no unified image emerged in the participating countries.

⁷⁷ OECD. The impact of COVID-19 on student equity and inclusion: Supporting vulnerable students during school closures and school re-openings (2020).

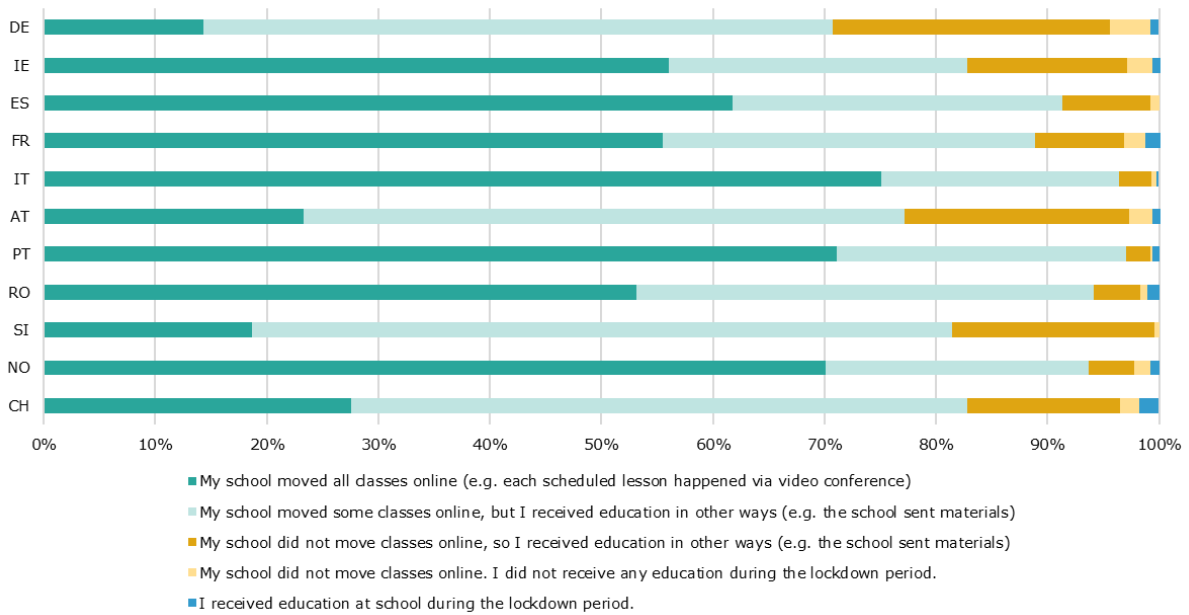
⁷⁸ In a partnership with the research office of UNICEF and 26 research centres in 15 European countries.

⁷⁹ [European Vocational Skills Week](#) 9-13 November 2020.

⁸⁰ IT (75%), PT (71%), NO (70%), ES (62%), FR (56%) and RO (53%).

⁸¹ SI (63%), DE (56%), CH (55%) and AT (53%).

Figure 28: Different modes of emergency remote schooling during the lockdown



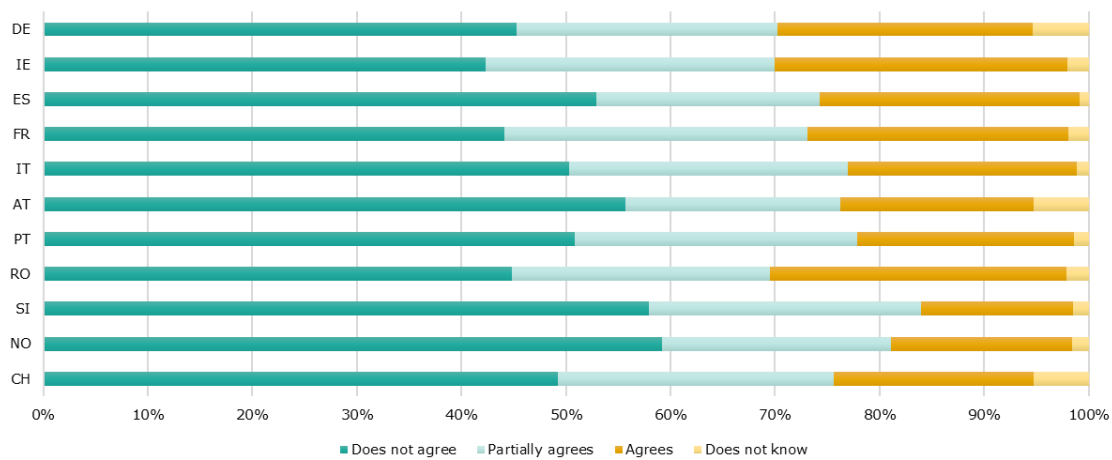
Source: KiDiCoTi consortium calculations.

Physical school closures caused concern among children that they would not be able to keep up with the workload, and among parents that the school closure could negatively affect their children’s education⁸². While several factors – e.g. readiness of the education system to react to the COVID-19 challenge – may have affected the perceived difficulties, there was a correlation between the share of children whose classes were moved partially or entirely on line and the extent of their worries.

Indeed, a specific burden on students was the helplessness they felt when doing school activities and homework online, as shown in Figure 29: Ireland (28%), Romania (28%), France (25%), Spain (25%) and Germany (24%) are the countries where around one quarter of the students said they feel “helpless” when facing on-line learning.

⁸² Vuorikari, R., Velicu, A., Chaudron, S., Cachia, R. and Di Gioia, R. (2020). [How families handled emergency remote schooling during the Covid-19 lockdown in spring 2020 – Summary of key findings from families with children in 11 European countries](#), A JRC Science for policy report, p. 10ff.

Figure 29: Share of students agreeing/disagreeing with the following sentence: “I feel helpless when I have to do school activities and homework online”



Source: KiDiCoTi consortium calculations.

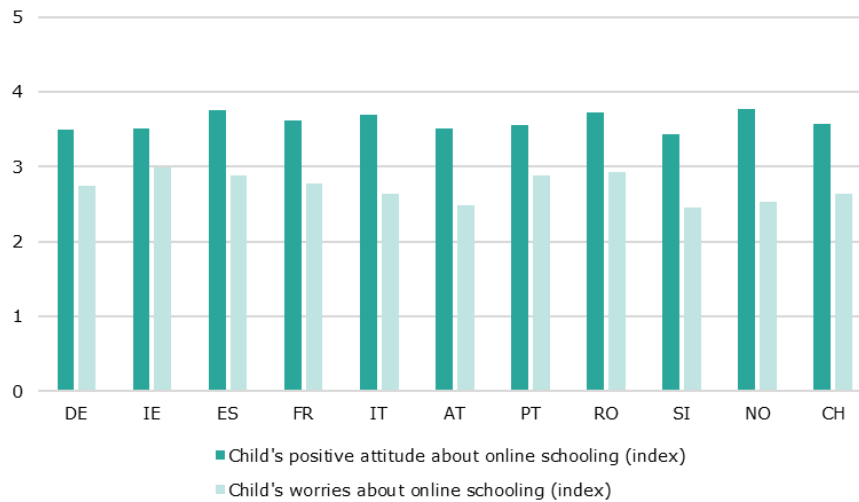
A broader indication of the effects of remote learning due to COVID-19 on children’s well-being can be derived from two indices calculated on the basis the KiDiCoTi responses, one of negative⁸³ and one of positive⁸⁴ attitudes related to remote learning. Both indices are measured on a scale from 0 (lowest) to 5 (highest).

Figure 30 shows that, overall, a positive attitude prevails in all countries, with the highest positive values recorded in Norway (3.8), Spain (3.8), Italy (3.7), and Romania (3.7). At the same time, some countries did experience stronger negative attitudes, notably Ireland (3.0), Portugal (2.9), Romania (2.9), and Spain (2.9). In some countries the gap between negative and positive attitudes is high, which indicates a potential polarisation in the student population. This is true in Norway (1.3), Italy (1.1), Austria (1), Switzerland (1), Slovenia (0.9), and Spain (0.9).

⁸³ This index uses the replies to the following statements capturing students’ negative attitudes related to on-line learning: (a) I get nervous participating in on-line activities; b) I worry that it will be difficult for me in on-line activities; c) I worry that I will get poor grades because of on-line activities; d) I worry that it will be difficult for me in on-line activities; e) I worry that it will be difficult for me to complete school activities on-line; f) I feel helpless when I have to do school activities and homework on-line). The index is obtained by summing up the individual responses over the five items, computing the individual average first and the country average as a final step.

⁸⁴ This index is a measure of the positive attitudes that students’ have with respect to on-line learning, obtained from the following items: g) I am motivated to participate in on-line activities; h) I learn quickly how to participate in on-line activities; i) I can follow even the most difficult teaching during on-line activities; l) have always believed that I am good with on-line activities. The index is obtained by summing up the individual responses over the four items, computing the individual average first and the country average as a final step.

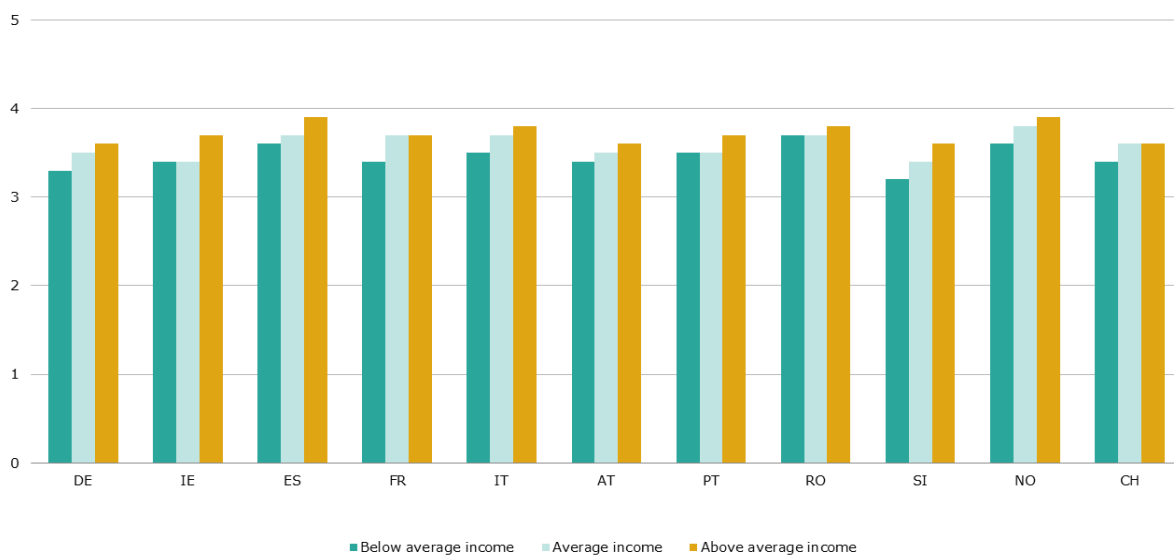
Figure 30: Child's positive and negative attitudes towards online learning (index)



Source: KiDiCoTi consortium calculations.

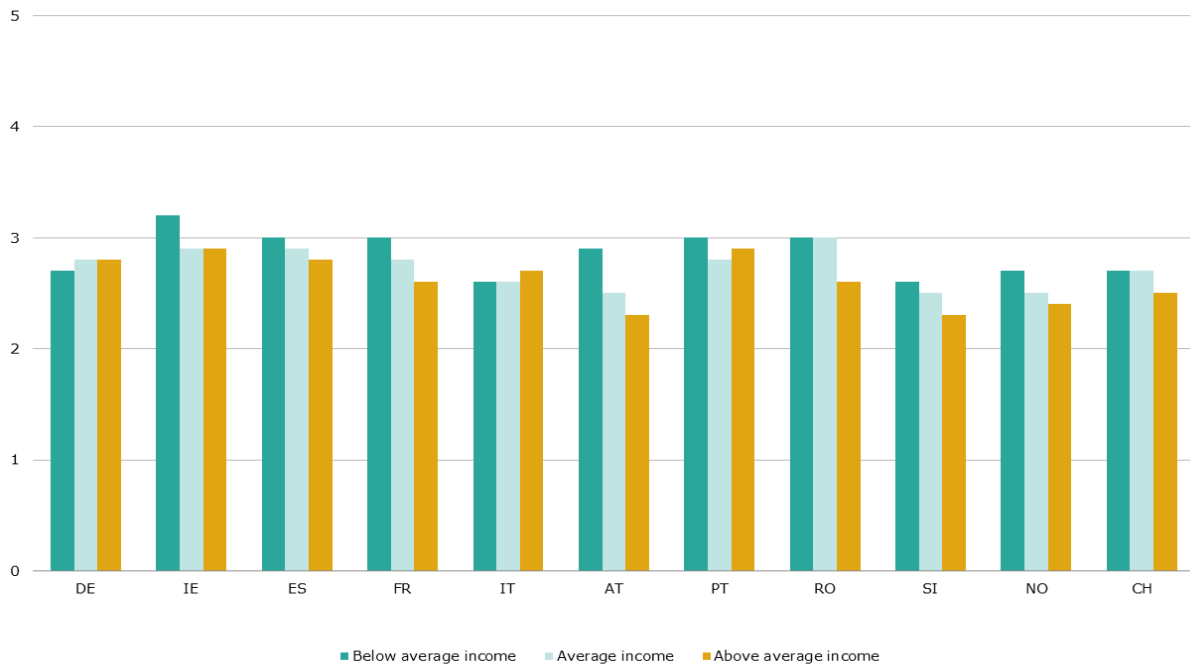
Positive and negative attitudes across different income⁸⁵ groups reveal a clear socio-economic gap, with a more positive view among children from above average income households (Figure 31 and Figure 32) and a more negative outlook in students (with the exception of Germany and Italy) from below-average income households. As further data becomes available it would be interesting to analyse whether a similar difference in impact will also be apparent in learning outcomes.

Figure 31: Child's positive attitudes towards online learning (index): by income group



Source: KiDiCoTi consortium calculations.

⁸⁵ This is the perception of household income relative to the "average" by the parent responding to the questionnaire.

Figure 32: Child's negative attitudes towards online learning (index): by income group


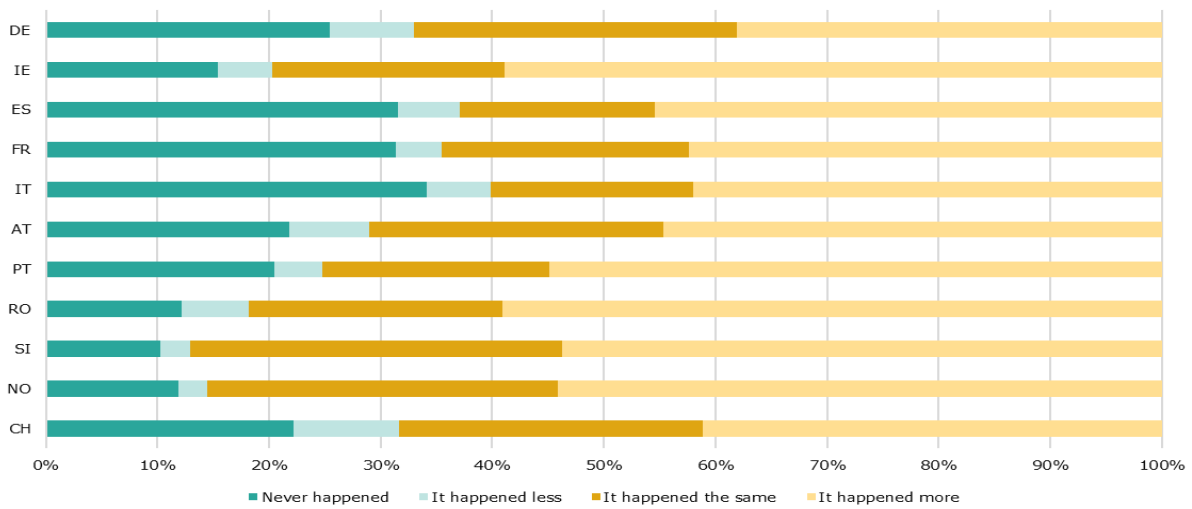
Source: KiDiCoTi consortium calculations.

On how schoolchildren spent their time during lockdown⁸⁶, KiDiCoTi data show that students spent close to 3.5 hours per day on digital technologies for school activities only. Many hours per day, close to 40% of their available time⁸⁷, were spent on the internet or using digital technologies (including digital games). This is somewhat expected, given the limitations to social activities during the lockdown, but it also signals a potential risk for the physical and mental well-being of students. Indeed, many students felt that they spent too much time on the internet or using digital devices, compared to pre-lockdown (Figure 33). The share of students reporting overuse of such tools was especially high in Romania (59%), Ireland (59%), Portugal (55%) and Norway (54%). In fact, a significant proportion of KiDiCoTi respondents across all countries replied that they were unable to sleep or eat because of the amount of time spent on the internet during the lockdown (and compared to the pre-lockdown period).

⁸⁶ For an analysis of the risks related to the use of internet and digital devices during the lockdown see: Lobe, B., Velicu, A., Staksrud, E., Chaudron S., Di Gioia, R. (2021). [How children \(10-18\) experienced online risks during the COVID-19 lockdown – Spring 2020](#). A JRC Technical Report.

⁸⁷ Assuming that 8 hours are devoted to sleeping.

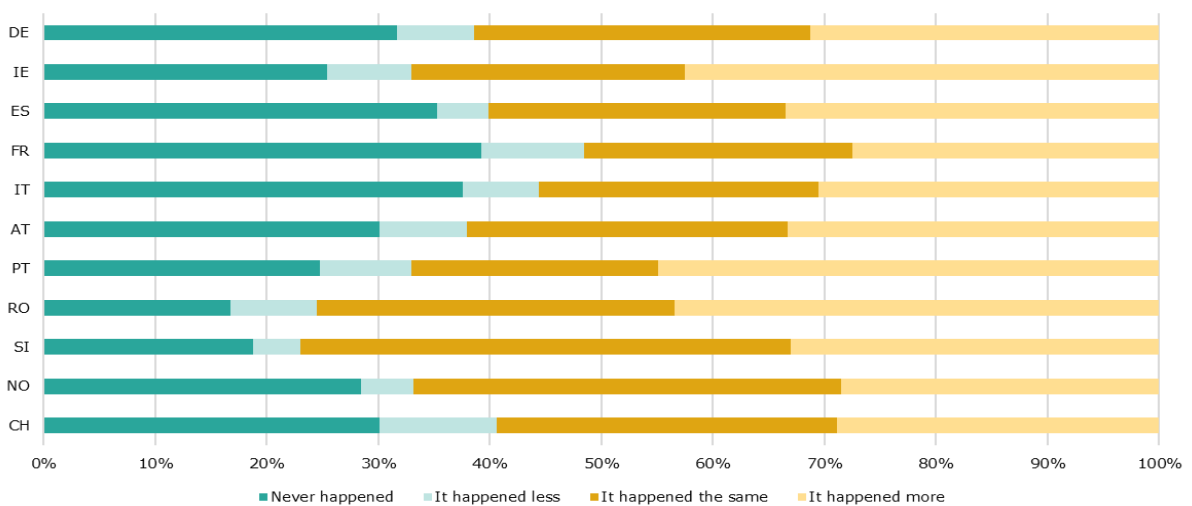
Figure 33: Share of students declaring to overuse internet or digital devices during lockdown (compared to pre-lockdown)



Source: KiDiCoTi consortium calculations.

It is worrying that in all countries a large proportion of students has unsuccessfully tried to reduce the time spent on the internet or on digital devices. Figure 34 shows that this has been especially the case in Portugal (45%), Romania (43%), and Ireland (43%), not surprisingly 3 of the 4 countries with the highest number of hours spent on-line or on digital devices.

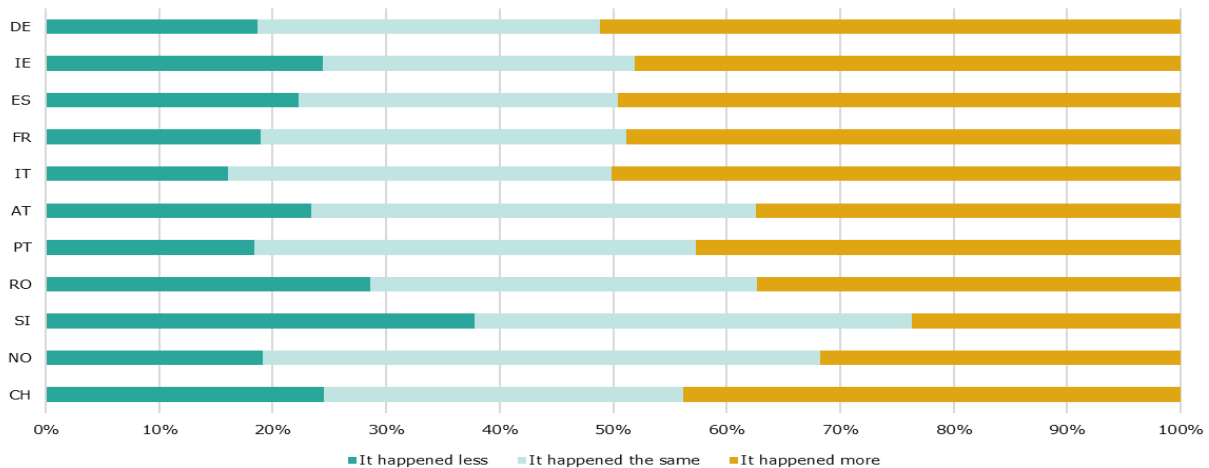
Figure 34: Share of students declaring to have been unable to reduce the number of hours spent on the internet or digital devices



Source: KiDiCoTi consortium calculations.

Given the substantial amount of time during lockdown spent using digital devices, an analysis of the occurrence of cyberbullying⁸⁸ during the lockdown is called for (Figure 35). The data show that in five countries (Germany, Italy, Spain, France and Ireland) around 50% of students have been more exposed to at least one form of cyberbullying during the lockdown than before⁸⁹. Moreover, an average of 44% (across the 11 countries covered by the survey) reports a higher exposure to cyberbullying during the lockdown whereas only 22% report a reduction during the same period.

Figure 35: Share of students who have been the victim of cyberbullying (CB) during the lockdown (compared to the pre-lockdown period)



Source: KiDiCoTi consortium calculations.

Finally, parents were asked for their opinions on the types of interventions schools could put in place to support parents and children during the lockdown. Three interventions stand out in the responses: (1) support to activities that allow interaction with schoolmates; (2) guidance on how to support the children with distance learning activities and homework; and (3) ideas for extracurricular activities that could be done at home. This indicates that parents, children, teachers and schools were ill-prepared for a sudden move to remote and on-line learning, but it also fits very well with conclusions from the pre-COVID evidence on the importance of need for social interaction for students' well-being.

1.5.2 COVID-19 and the well-being of higher education students

COVID-19 and the related containment measures have posed a great challenge to student well-being, especially well-being of higher education students. As individuals progress through the education system, academic challenges increase and so does the pressure to perform well. Add to this lifestyle changes, relocation to a different geographical area or even abroad, a newly gained freedom to make decisions, and a higher form of mental pressure is to be expected. Indeed, evidence shows depressive symptoms occur more often among university students than among the general population⁹⁰.

⁸⁸ The KiDiCoTi questionnaire qualifies four behaviours as cyberbullying: (1) "nasty or hurtful messages sent to me" (i.e. to the student answering the question); (2) "nasty or hurtful messages about me were passed around or posted where others could see"; (3) "I was left out or excluded from a group or activity on the internet"; (4) "I was threatened on the internet".

⁸⁹ Some of this phenomenon may have been a "transfer" of in-person bullying, which was no longer possible as children were only interacting with their peers online.

⁹⁰ Wörfel F., Guys, B., Lohmann, K., Töpitz, K. and Kleiber, D. (2016). [Mental health problems among university students and the impact of structural conditions](#). *Journal of Public Health*, 24(2), 125–33.

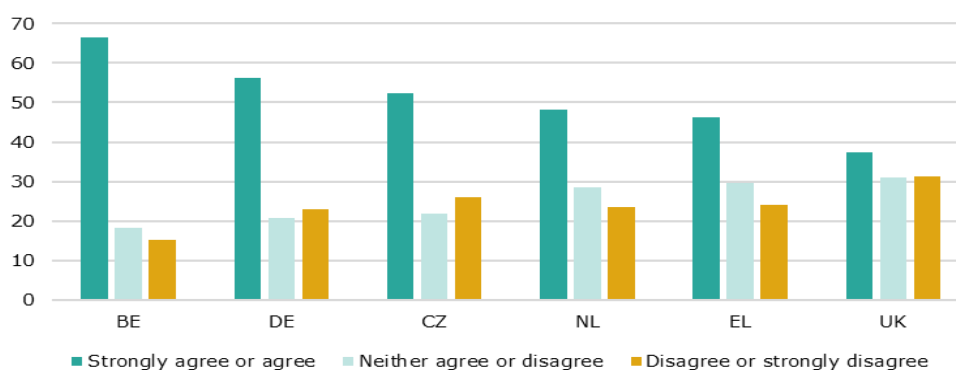
During the COVID-19 pandemic several factors may have negatively affected the well-being of higher education students. These include changes in social and family life, lack of social life and fear of illness, the sudden switch to remote teaching and learning, the cancellation or postponement of important events such as graduation ceremonies or participation in study exchange programmes or traineeships, the loss of part-time jobs, and the increased uncertainty about labour market prospects after graduation.

One cross-country data source that examines the impact of COVID-19 on higher education students' well-being is the COVID-19 International Student Well-being Study (C19 ISWS)⁹¹. Several studies based on the C19 ISWS data make it possible to take a closer look at students in one or more higher education institutions in Greece, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Czechia and the United Kingdom⁹².

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, most higher education institutions around the world were quickly forced to move their courses online. It might be expected that such an unexpected change could pose a serious threat to student well-being by inducing academic-related stress and anxiety, in turn leading to a reduced memory span, distraction, lack of confidence and poor reasoning power⁹³.

As shown in Figure 36, in all the European countries here considered a large proportion of students perceive a significantly increased workload during the COVID-19 pandemic; this perception, it should be noted, may be biased.

Figure 36: "My university/college workload has significantly increased during the COVID-19 outbreak"



Source: C19 ISWS Survey

⁹¹ Data were collected on students from 110 higher education institutions located in 26 different countries during the spring of 2020. Participants were contacted online and asked to compare their current situation with that before the COVID-19 outbreak. For more information on C19 ISWS, see Van de Velde S., Buffel, V., Bracke, P., Van Hal, G., Somogyi, N.M., Willems, B., Wouters, E. and C19 ISWS consortium (2021). [The COVID-19 International Student Well-being Study](#). In: *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health*, 49(1), 114-122.

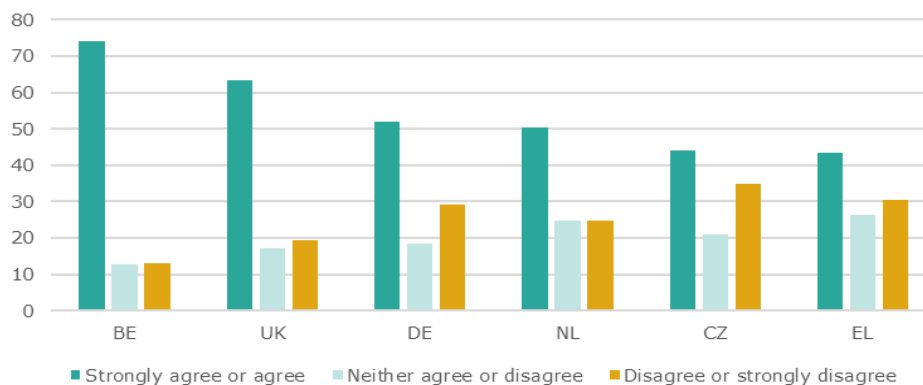
⁹² Stathopoulou T., Mouriki A. and Papaliou O. (2020). [Student well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic in Greece. Results from the C19 ISWS Survey](#). A National Centre for Social Research paper (EKKE); Busse, H. and Zeeb, H. (2020). [International COVID-19 Student Well-being Survey \(C19 ISWS\)](#). Kurzbericht zu Ergebnissen der Online-Befragung für den Standort Bremen; Super, S. and van Disseldorp, L. (2020). [COVID-19 International Student Well-being Study \(C19 ISWS\)](#). Data from Wageningen University and Research. De Man, Buffel, V., van de Velde, S. Bracke, P., Van Hal, G.F. and Wouters, E. (2021). [Disentangling depression in Belgian higher education students amidst the first COVID-19 lockdown \(April-May 2020\)](#). *Archives of Public Health*, 79(1), 1-10; van de Velde, S., Buffel, V., Wouters, E., Van Hal, G.F., Bracke, P. and Colman, L. (2020) [COVID-19 International Student Well-being Study](#). Eerste resultaten Belgische cijfers. Klusáček, J. Kudrnáčová, M. and Soukup, P. (2020). [Studenti VŠ v první vlně pandemie: COVID-19 International Student Well-being Study](#). Rabiee-Khan, F. and Biernat, K. (2021). [Student well-being during the first wave of COVID-19 pandemic in Birmingham, UK. Results from the C19 ISWS Survey](#).

⁹³ Aronen, E.T., Vuontella, V., Steenari, M.R., Salmi, J. and Carlson, S. (2004). [Working memory, psychiatric symptoms, and academic performance](#). In: *Neurobiology of Learning and Memory*, 83(1), 33-42.

Furthermore, following COVID-19 and the related lockdown, a high percentage of students, especially in Belgium and Greece, reported concern about their ability to successfully complete the academic year.

The change in teaching methods resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic created a source of stress for higher education students (Figure 37) like it did for the respondents of the KiDiCoTi survey (see above). This seems to be especially the case in Belgium and in the United Kingdom. Possible reasons include not having a computer, affordable access to the internet, a stable internet connection or even basic digital skills.

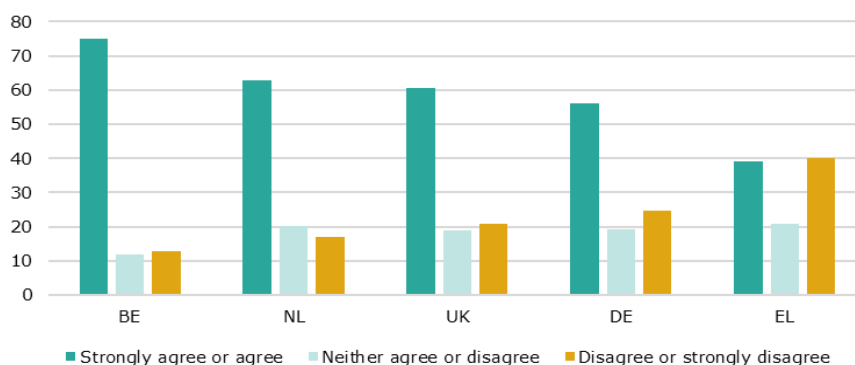
Figure 37: "The change in teaching methods resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak has caused significant stress to me"



Source: C19 ISWS Survey

Indeed, the move to an online learning environment was a major adjustment. For instance, the content of many courses, which was originally designed for face-to-face teaching, had to be revised, and student assessments had to be changed to an online format. As shown in Figure 38⁹⁴, the implications of the sudden switch to online learning created a lot of uncertainty among students. The percentage of students being uncertain about expectations since the pandemic was high, particularly in Belgium.

Figure 38: "I have known less about what is expected of me in various course modules/units since the COVID-19 outbreak"

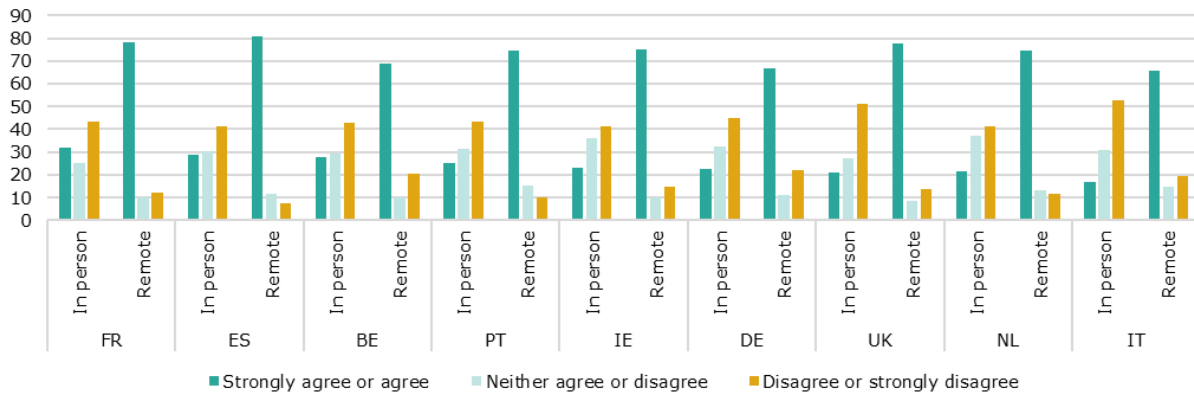


Source: C19 ISWS Survey

⁹⁴ Data from CZ are not shown in this table given that the wording of the relevant question is slightly different from that in the other countries.

Data from a global survey on “Student perceptions of remote learning”⁹⁵, which contacted participants through Instagram, corroborate the hypothesis that the switch from in-person to online learning was a source of great preoccupation for higher education students, affecting their learning motivation as well as their ability to concentrate. Considering only those European countries for which the number of respondents is 99 or more, there is consistent evidence indicating that motivation in online learning environments is considerably lower compared to in-person classes⁹⁶. Students from different European countries systematically report to be *more distracted in online* environments compared to in-person settings (Figure 39).

Figure 39: “I am often distracted when doing course work or attending classes”

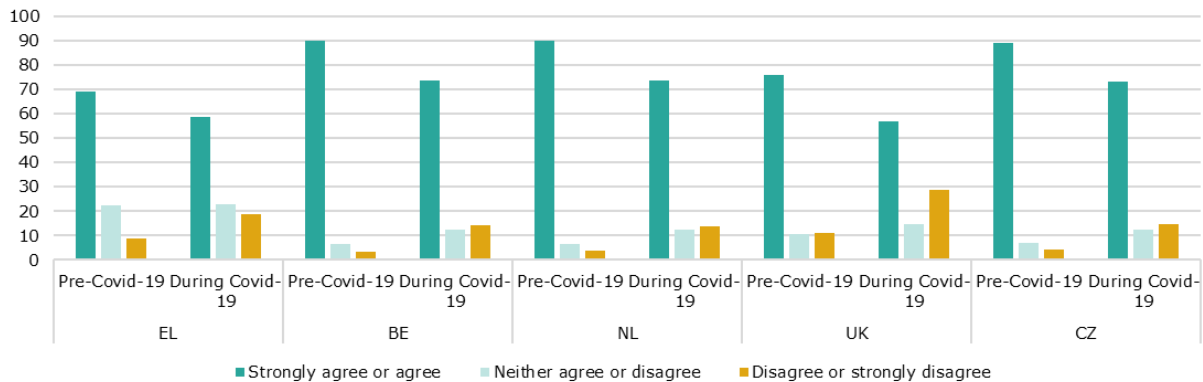


Source: Student perceptions of remote learning.

In addition to academic stress, COVID-19 is likely to cause increased financial stress, for example due to job loss or parents’ decreased ability to contribute to the cost of their children’s education, having a negative impact on higher education students’ well-being. Financial stress can cause depression and lack of sleep. It may have a negative impact on cognitive ability because of concentration problems. As illustrated in Figure 40, the C19 ISWS survey shows that the pandemic had a negative impact on students’ ability to cover their monthly costs. The proportion of students reporting to be financially stressed has significantly increased during COVID-19.

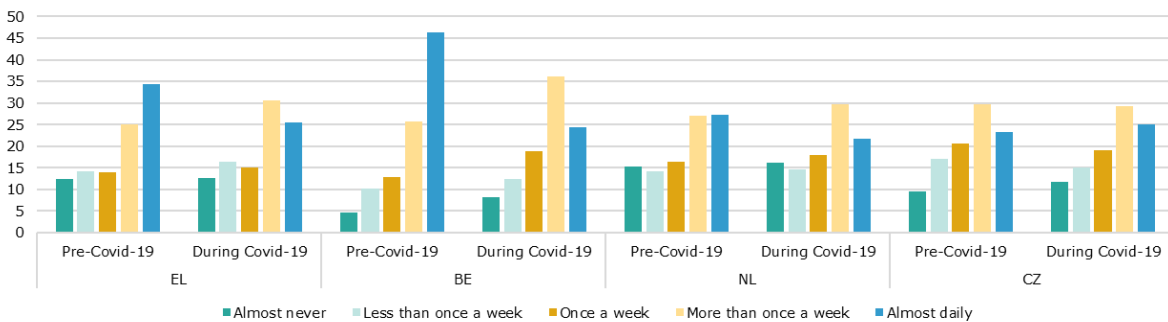
⁹⁵ Stein, G. (2020). Student perceptions of remote learning, Harvard Dataverse, V1.

⁹⁶ One should bear in mind that the samples from the two surveys used here are both convenience samples and hence are not representative of the student population in higher education. This means that the results should be interpreted cautiously as they may be subject to some bias. E.g. it is possible that participation in the surveys was higher among students suffering from stress due to COVID-19 compared to their peers who did not experience any stress. A study of student motivation during the remote learning during pandemic should not necessarily lead to more general conclusions on student motivation in online learning environments in non-crisis periods (e.g. students who follow exclusively-online masters’ courses). The motivation of a student who expected to attend physical classes but was forced to go online due to a pandemic, and the motivation of a student who chooses to do an online degree, will not be the same as their initial expectations were not the same.

Figure 40: "I had sufficient financial resources to cover my monthly costs"


Source: C19 ISWS Survey.

Regular physical activity contributes to well-being: research has demonstrated that physical exercise may improve mood, the ability to sleep and self-esteem and can enhance cognitive functioning⁹⁷. Fewer occasions to exercise through lockdown measures as well as greater anxiety caused by both academic and financial stress as a result of COVID-19 could be expected to have increased physical inactivity among students. Findings from the C19 ISWS survey⁹⁸ indeed show a decrease in the share of students performing almost daily "moderate" physical activities (e.g. easy cycling, walking) in all countries considered but Czechia (Figure 41). The opposite result, however, is observed in Figure 42 for "vigorous" physical activities (defined as at least 30 minutes of fast cycling, aerobics, running, lifting heavy weights): the proportion of students who engage almost daily in these types of activities increased during the pandemic (with the exception of Dutch students).

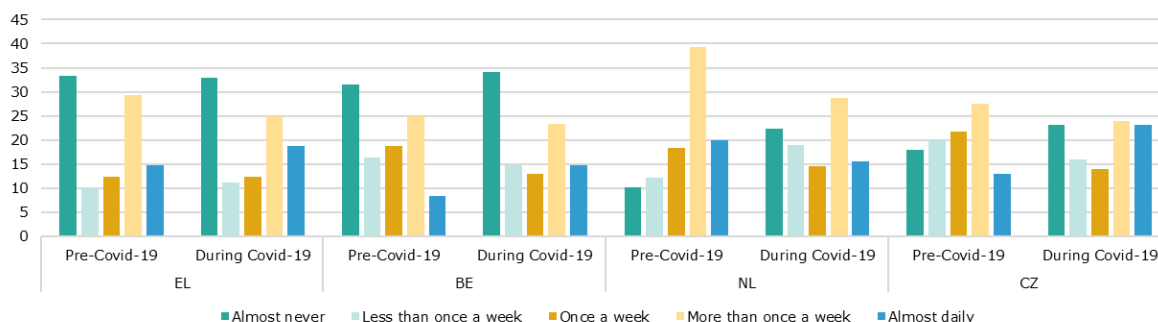
Figure 41: Frequency of moderate physical activity before and during COVID-19


Source: C19 ISWS Survey.

⁹⁷ Lambourne, K. (2006). The relationship between working memory capacity and physical activity rates in young adults. *Journal of Sports Science and Medicine*, 5(1), 149–153.

⁹⁸ Relevant information about the UK, though available, is unfortunately not comparable with data from other countries since UK respondents were given the possibility to select an additional option, i.e. "twice a week".

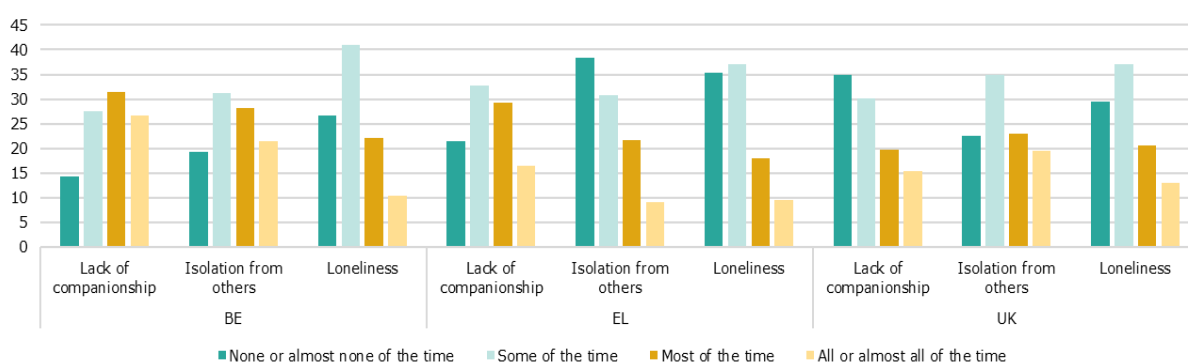
Figure 42: Frequency of vigorous physical activity before and during COVID-19



Source: C19 ISWS Survey.

COVID-19 social distancing and lockdown measures meant that students could not meet up with their family (unless they were in the same household), friends and colleagues, impacting negatively on their well-being. Indeed, evidence associates loneliness with clinical insomnia⁹⁹, depression and anxiety¹⁰⁰. C19 ISWS data from Belgium, Greece and the United Kingdom indicate that a relatively large proportion of students reported a lack of companionship, isolation from others, and loneliness at least some time during the week prior to the interview (Figure 43).

Figure 43: Feelings of loneliness during the pandemic



Source: C19 ISWS Survey.

Overall, the available evidence suggests that the pandemic had a negative impact on higher education students' well-being, with increased academic and financial stress, a lack of regular moderate physical activity (partially compensated by an increase in regular vigorous physical activity) and an increased sense of isolation and loneliness.

This may have consequences in both the short- and long-term both at micro and macro level. For example, anxiety is associated with lower academic performance, a higher drop-out risk, delays in graduation¹⁰¹ and worse labour market prospects. At macro level, since higher education is heavily

⁹⁹ Kokou-Kpolou, C.K., Megalakaki, O., Laimou, D. and Kousouri, M. (2020). [Insomnia during COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown: prevalence, severity, and associated risk factors in French population](#). In: *Psychiatry Research*, 290, 113-128.

¹⁰⁰ Hoffart, A., Sverre U.J., Ebrahimi, O.V. (2020). [Loneliness and social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic: Risk factors and associations with psychopathology](#). In: *Frontiers in Psychiatry*.

¹⁰¹ Using data on Swedish university students, a study (i.e. Andersson, C., Johnsson, K.O., Berglund, M. and Öjehagen, A. (2009). [Stress and hazardous alcohol use: Associations with early dropout from university](#). *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health*, 37(3), 713-719) finds a close association between stress and dropout. According to the American College of Health Association, in 2015 30% of students stated that stress interfered with their academic achievement within the previous year. Finally, there is some evidence that financial stress makes college students less likely to graduate on time.

subsidised by governments, higher drop-out rates may lead to an inefficient use of public money and a lower future economic growth. To alleviate these effects and assist students in these difficult circumstances, higher education institutions could put in place mechanisms to monitor stress among their students. Easy, accessible mental help support could be provided by these institutions (e.g. mindful mediation can be quite effective in reducing stress and anxiety in higher education students¹⁰²).

1.5.3 Well-being and resilience of VET students under COVID-19

The analysis so far has made it clear that the transition from the physical space of schools and workplaces to being secluded at home and learning online has come at a cost. The extraordinary experience of this pandemic has placed a lot of stress on the education and training systems as well as on career guidance and counselling services. Besides the obvious challenges, it is possibly even more important to find out how countries were able to support vocational learners (both in school-based VET and apprenticeships) in this overnight transition.

According to Cedefop's *Network of Ambassadors tackling early leaving from Vocational Education and Training*¹⁰³, the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 was felt hardest by the most vulnerable learners across Europe. While the consequences of the crisis might be similar irrespective of the level of education, they are expected to be more serious for the VET sector. According to an online survey conducted by the European Commission in 2020 on how VET ensured continuity of learning and teaching through COVID¹⁰⁴, VET learners may be at a greater disadvantage than those from other educational tracks. For many of them, living in poverty with no digital devices and/or web access at home, or living in remote areas with a lack of learning materials or school supplies, the school closures due to COVID-19 have plunged them further into hardship.

Cedefop CareersNet¹⁰⁵ experts drew attention in particular to similar issues concerning guidance and counselling, for example the social digital divide, the potential higher drop-out rates in VET, geographical disparities, and an increase in anxiety and psychological disorders in relation to the COVID-19 crisis. They noted that demand for psychosocial support increased considerably, reflecting the uncertainty created by the pandemic for specific groups, particularly end-year learners. To help VET learners stay in education and training and cope with increased anxiety and psychological disorders, the approach taken by education and training systems and lifelong guidance systems (educational sector) was broadly the same even though the level of actual implementation might have differed across countries. On the one hand, the goal was to make tailored support available to vulnerable individuals based on their specific needs or support the whole family rather than the individual where necessary. Although distant support was the default, face-to-face services were not excluded if deemed necessary and where resources were available. Attempts were made to establish personal contact with learners over the phone, e.g. to support those at risk of early leaving from education and training (ELET). Where necessary and possible, both learners and their parents were provided with support. Finally and in the best case scenario, the support was generally wide-ranging, involving teachers, guidance practitioners, social workers and psychological counsellors. The aim was to support learning and well-being, and qualities such as resilience and adaptability.

E.g. Letkiewicz, J., Lim, H., Heckman, S., Bartholomae, S., Fox, J. and Montalto, C.P. (2014). [The path to graduation: Factors predicting on-time graduation rates](#). In: *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice*, 16(3), 351-371.

¹⁰² Bamber, M.D and Schneider, J.K. (2016). [Mindfulness-based meditation to decrease stress and anxiety in college students: A narrative synthesis of the research](#). *Educational Research Review*, 18, 1-32.

¹⁰³ Cedefop (2020). Digital gap during COVID-19 for VET learners at risk in Europe. Synthesis report based on preliminary information on seven countries provided by Cedefop's Network of Ambassadors tackling early leaving from VET.

¹⁰⁴ [European Vocational Skills Week](#) 9-13 November 2020.

¹⁰⁵ Cedefop (2020). [Note on lifelong guidance and the COVID-19 pandemic](#). Responses from Cedefop's CareersNet.

Particular attention should be paid to apprentices, who, unlike school-based VET learners, spend an extensive period of their studies at an employer, with whom they have a contractual link and receive remuneration. While they face the same challenge as their peers in school-based VET and may need the same type of support (as outlined above), they also face additional issues such as the closure of their training company. During the lockdown, apprentices lost key learning outcomes (work and interpersonal skills) that they would have gained at the workplace¹⁰⁶. Key challenges related to COVID-19 included: (i) a decrease in the supply of apprenticeships; and (ii) severe disruptions in the normal provision of education and training for those apprentices who remained in training¹⁰⁷.

Some initiatives were taken, often by public employment services and/or educational authorities, to mitigate the economic impact on apprentices, such as allowing those working under the labour code to access labour market measures or unemployment benefits, until they could resume their in-company training. Apprentices whose contracts were not covered by the labour code, usually received a State grant. Measures are now needed to enable apprentices to catch up on learning.

The current crisis has shown that there is no digital inclusion without social inclusion. Marginalised and vulnerable learners are less likely to be involved in distance learning procedures; disconnecting for a longer period may lead them to drop-out from their VET programme. At the same time, evidence shows that existing digital learning formats do have their limits and thus cannot replace or bring the same social benefits as the physical space of schools and workplaces.

¹⁰⁶ Cedefop (2020). How are European countries managing apprenticeships to respond to the COVID-19 crisis? Synthesis report based on information provided by Cedefop community of apprenticeship experts.

¹⁰⁷ According to the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) Pledge Monitoring Survey of EAfA members, conducted between February and April 2021; [EAfA Monitoring Survey 2019-2020](#), Apprenticeship Support Services.