

This submission was produced as a collaborative effort between [Youth RISE](#), [Youth-LEAD](#), [Y+ Global](#), and [Y-Peer Asia-Pacific](#). This is representative of wider collaborations between all organizations throughout the pandemic.

1. What are the main challenges that young people face in the country/region where you operate in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic and its response? If any age-disaggregated data has been collected in this regard, please include it in your response.

Gender-based violence, intimate partner violence and rape - Young people have reported an increase in sexual and gender-based violence experienced by them during the pandemic. Due to the closing of services and safe-spaces offered to vulnerable young people, they have been forced to stay at home or remain in unsafe environments. Adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in particular are at a particularly high-risk of domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence. The perpetrators of gender-based violence are generally known by the victims, a trend seen before the pandemic but which has only increased due to the lack of opportunities for AGYW to seek refuge outside of the home.

Limited access to treatment (HIV, TB), GBV and SRHR services - The pandemic forced a shift in the focus of health policy towards COVID-specific issues, leaving gaps in the system for young people (in particular, adolescent and young key affected populations (AYKP) and AGYW). Young women living with HIV are facing unprecedented [challenges](#) during this global crisis. We have seen a reduction in access to HIV testing which is further hindering timely access to HIV prevention and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services, as well as disrupted and delayed access to anti-retroviral treatment (ART). Further compounding these issues is a lack of proper nutrition and access to other essential services due to lockdown. The AYKP and AGYW most impacted by these disruptions are also extremely vulnerable in other ways. Those who have lost their income during the pandemic have faced additional barriers to accessing the appropriate care and support due to their financial situation as a result of the pandemic.

Mental health issues - During the pandemic young people experienced massive disruption to their daily lives and their development as people. The lack of freedom as a result of lockdowns has, as outlined above, led to AGYW in particular being confined to the home where they may be experiencing violence. This, of course, is to the massive detriment to the mental health of these young people and is compounded by a possible loss of jobs and with it, a further loss of freedom and autonomy. This is without even considering the psychological impact of death during the pandemic and a lack of emotional support during the grieving process due to lockdown restriction limiting attendance at funerals, among other things. The impacts of this psychological damage will be felt long beyond the pandemic.

Keeping in mind the mental health issues, Y+ Global with the support of UNAIDS initiated a pilot project named [Social Aid Fund](#) to provide [emergency support](#) to those communities severely impacted by COVID-19. The pilot project was implemented in Malawi and Nigeria.

The project focused on providing social aid, such as food items (58 beneficiaries), SRHR commodities such as sanitary pads (11 beneficiaries), money for necessities (22 beneficiaries), transport support for ART (28 beneficiaries), support for school fees (4 beneficiaries), COVID-19 necessities such as masks and PPE (32 beneficiaries) (Total 155 beneficiaries). In total, 155 beneficiaries received support and approximately half of the beneficiaries identified nutrition as the most crucial need.

Youth RISE, with the support of the [Robert Carr Fund](#), carried out similar targeted interventions with particularly vulnerable young people who use drugs (YPUD) and other AYKP. Youth RISE distributed food supplies and PPE within the community of YPUD in Nepal, Pakistan and Argentina.

With the support of Y+ Global under the 4Youth programme, Chile Positivo Foundation completed research on the effects of the pandemic in the lives of young people living with HIV (YPLHIV) in Latin America. The main objectives of the research were to:

- Explore the main difficulties and concerns that YPLHIV has faced in Latin America.
- Identify mechanisms that help YPLHIV in Latin America face the pandemic's harmful effects.
- Recognise the opportunities that the pandemic can bring to YPLHIV in Latin America.

The study shows how the COVID-19 pandemic has hindered or outright prevented access to tests, controls and, in some cases, ART. This is a significant problem because it impacts the overall physical health and immune system of YPLHIV, and in turn their bodies ability to recover from a COVID-19 infection. The pandemic has also overwhelmed health services across the world and has led to a deprioritization of YPLHIV. Many young people were forced to interrupt their ART and in general the pandemic has resulted in poorer health outcomes and has prevented YPLHIV from accessing information on their health and viral load.

Access to information on COVID-19 and vaccines - Through surveys carried out by our networks, we identified lack of access to reliable and actual information on COVID-19 and vaccines to be a major concern. During the pandemic we have seen that young people, and in particular AYKP, have struggled to access factual information and what information they did present was often misinformed.

Socio-economic and impacts on academia - The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a number of economic difficulties on both a state and inter-personal level. Industries which are overwhelmingly populated by young workers (hospitality and service industries for example) were among the most harshly affected by the pandemic and lockdown restrictions. Our evidence indicates that young people have found it increasingly difficult to enter the labour market and consequently find themselves forced to engage in informal and higher-risk industries. That is if they are not without employment entirely. Young people working in health services have faced incredibly stressful and difficult working environments and often were forced to work in professional healthcare settings while still completing their medical qualifications to deal with understaffing.

Fears and uncertainty - Linked to the above mentioned issue regarding lack of access to information about COVID-19, YPLHIV and other AYKP displayed fear of being exposed to COVID-19 and the impact this may have on their wider health outcomes. YPLHIV and AYKP can be particularly vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19 due to their serological status and overall poor health outcomes. These fears are further exacerbated by an overall lack of access to healthcare and a reduced access to AYKP specific services during the pandemic. These fears also lead to vulnerable young people isolating themselves, from their own communities and wider society, out of fear of contracting COVID-19. The impact on HIV prevention and treatment services meant many young people expressed that they had a reduced knowledge of their viral load or CD4 count. In the case of the CD4 count, this further compounded the issues mentioned here as YPLHIV felt more vulnerable to COVID-19 infection and symptoms as a result. Not only does this fear and isolation damage the mental health of these young people, it also reduces contact with their community and peer-outreach workers or other key pieces of information being spread through communities of AYKP.

2. What measures are taken in the country/region where you operate to support young people and ensure the full implementation of their rights during and after the pandemic? Please provide examples of policies and programmes adopted to this end, in particular regarding

- **right to work and social security (including, for example, to address the job loss, reduction of working hours, wage cut, etc.);**
- **right to education (including in the context of the closure of educational institutions and transition to online learning);**
- **right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health (including with the increase in domestic violence and abuse, anxiety and depression, stress caused by social isolation, etc.);**
- **right to participate meaningfully in political and public affairs (including in connection with the prohibition of gatherings and transition to online rallies);**
- **other rights or freedoms.**

Priority needs identified and supported by our organizations include:

- Support in raising awareness on gender-based violence and available support systems, starting support systems for AGYW to protect themselves from abuse.
- Transport fares to travel and access treatment (HIV, TB), GBV and SRHR services.
- Support provided to young people with food hampers and hygiene packs who are mostly in need during COVID-19.
- Y+ Global (in partnership with WHO, UNAIDS, UNWOMEN and AVERT) will develop COVID-19 accurate information (including a vaccine component) and share with grantees for further dissemination on raising awareness of COVID-19.
- Support with PPE including sanitary material for AGYW and increasing access to covid testing for AGYW with disabilities who face barriers in accessing healthcare.
- Reviewing the situation on ground with support of situation analysis study for YPLHIV, AYKP and AGYW to recommend the right path to advocacy at the country level.
- Advocating for investing in relevant skill acquisition training to boost young people's resilience and income generation to counteract issues in joining the labour force.
- Identification of challenges and priorities at the policy level through COVID-19 response mechanism helped to raise the voices of young people in the national spaces.
- Involving young people at the policy level discussion with the view of ethical engagement in the decision making spaces

3. What role have the young people had in COVID-19 response, vaccination and recovery efforts in the country/region where you operate?

The international or regional scope of our organizations left us well-positioned to engage with young people in online settings and foster spaces for young people to exchange information, implement mutual support and learning strategies, and share and create tools to protect themselves. Y+ Global has been supporting young people in their diversity in leading the advocacy efforts for equitable access to COVID 19 test and vaccinations. Youth RISE was able to distribute small grants to our network to co-ordinate COVID-19 relief and response projects targeting YPUD and other AYKP. These projects represent wider patterns of mutual community support seen among YPUD and other AYKP. These communities of young people stepped forward to protect each other in times of need and prevented the communities from falling entirely through the cracks of the COVID-19 response efforts on a country level, which often ignored their needs and further marginalized these vulnerable communities.

4. What measures are taken in the country/region where you operate to value/encourage the role of youth in COVID-19 response, vaccination and recovery efforts?

It is essential that governments consider the participation of young people, YPLHIV and other AYKP in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. The stories of the young people in Latinamerica have shown that the governments of the different countries have focused mainly on tackling COVID-19 and cutting off the circulation of the virus. However, in their health efforts and measures they have not considered the experiences and participation of YPLHIV and AYKP. For this reason, the data, stories and information has shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has directly affected the health and well-being of YPLHIV and other AYKP, while simultaneously violating their rights and limiting their access to essential services. Therefore, it is essential that governments are willing to engage with communities or organizations of young people living with HIV and AYKP to better address their needs and concerns of these vulnerable communities. In this sense, additional collaboration between states, healthcare services, and community organizations is vital to ensuring the needs of all young people are being met in this time of great difficulty. We must not lose the progress made in HIV prevention and treatment.