



THE BARTLETT



**PANEX Youth**

**The impact of COVID-19 on Education, Food and Play/Leisure and Related Adaptations of Children and Young People in England**

# Welcome!

## WP2/3 Stakeholders' Workshop



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University of Fort Hare  
Together in Excellence



## PANEX Youth

# The impact of COVID-19 on Education, Food and Play/Leisure and Related Adaptations of Children and Young People in England

## WP2/3 Stakeholders' Workshop

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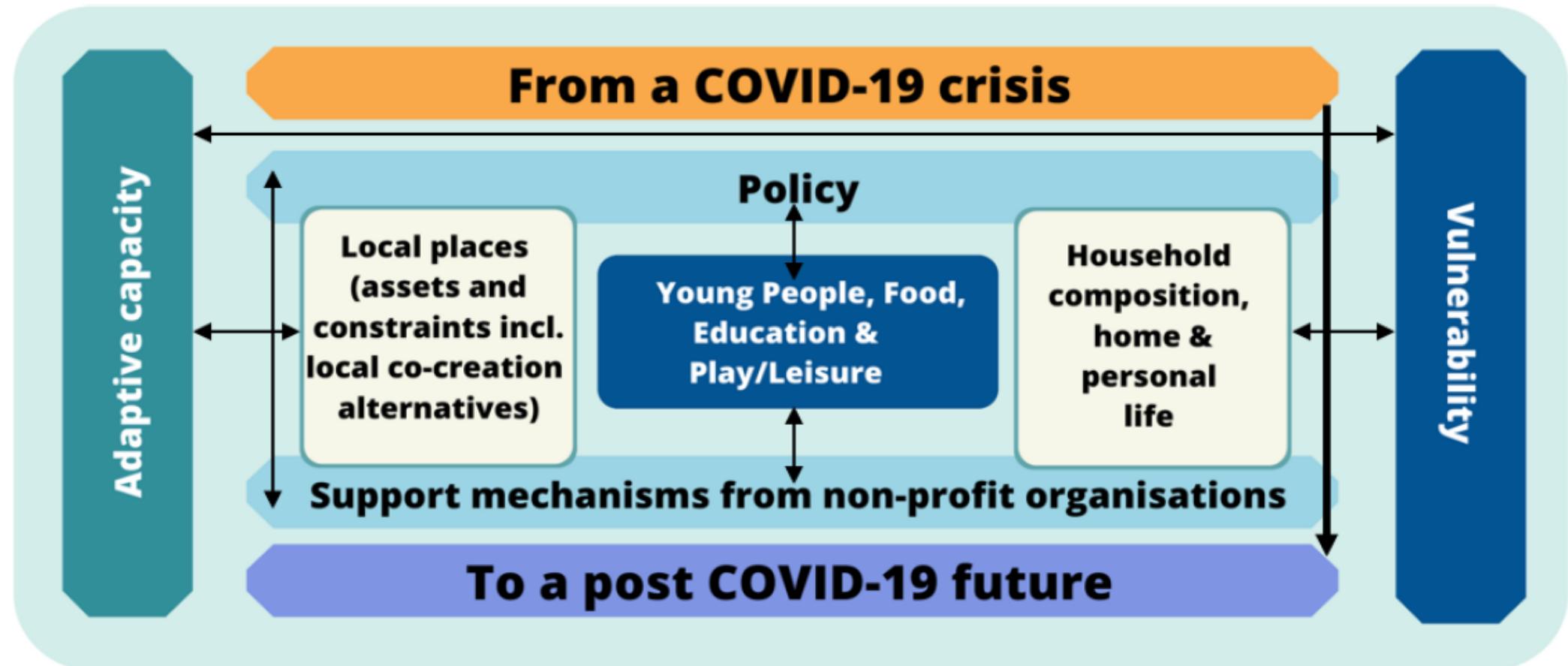
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## Panex-Youth Aim:

- **Understand and assess the impact of COVID-19 and associated policies on education, food, play/leisure of young people (10–24, as per UNICEF definition) living in deprived settings and in conditions of 'poverty' (as characterised in respective country settings), with a focus on three countries/regions: Brazil (São Paulo State/Paraisópolis), RSA (Central RSA/Mangaung and Moqhaka), and the UK (West Midlands/Birmingham).**
- We are focusing on education, food and play/leisure - all crucial, interlinked components of youths' health and social-psychological development significantly impacted by the pandemic and affecting their **socio-economic resilience** (and mental health/wellbeing).



# Work packages

- **WP2: Global Mapping Exercise (completed)**
- **WP3: National and Regional Mapping (West-East Midlands; Central RSA; and São Paulo State/Paraisópolis) – 32 interviews p/c (completed)**
  - *The impact of the pandemic on the food/education/play-leisure nexus*
  - *Vulnerability, place, social networks and adaptations*
  - *Legacy and ongoing crisis*
- **WP4: Zoom-ins on local adaptations of young people in monetary-poor households – 50 interviews with vulnerable young people p/c (support from community of practice) - ongoing**
- **WP5: Co-designing multi-scalar solutions to foster young people's recovery, & resilience (local / international cafés) - ongoing**
  - Build upon the co-production of knowledge that emerged to foster innovative thinking;
  - Co-design multi-level recommendations at case study, city, regional, country and international levels;
  - Foster transfer of knowledge and ideas amongst communities, practitioners, and academics

## Goals of today's seminar:

- Present and summarise the key results from the first two stages of the PANEX-YOUTH research, with a focus on England (incl. global and national mapping exercise + 32 interviews done with key organisations between February and June 2023).
- Provide preliminary insights about our current work with young people
- Shape a community of practice and discuss further collaborations

*Report to be circulated very soon*

## **Methods (WP3): 32 interviews with representatives from:**

- Charities (incl. Foundations and Think-Tanks) working either across England or in specific English regions, and specialized in the following sectors: food education, food policy, food provision (including food banks) and healthy food; education provision, education and digital technology, education policy, education and youth, social mobility and educational disadvantage; play provision, play policy; support to disadvantaged and vulnerable young people.
- Not-for profit social enterprises focusing on youth education, youth employment, food and nutrition.
- Schools/Colleges.
- Private Companies specialized in supporting education organisations and play provision.
- Research Institutions with specific expertise in education, food and health and children/young people.
- Local and Combined Authorities.
- Diocesan and Faith groups.
- National networks representing community organisations in the faith and play sector.
- Young People Ambassadors.

# **COVID-19 and national Government responses as a catalyst for furthering socio-economic inequalities**

## **1. COVID-19 and national Government responses as a catalyst for furthering socio-economic inequalities**

### **1.1 At national level, Governmental policies and responses to the diverse, localized impacts of COVID-19 were often not adequate.**

Local organisations, authorities and communities came together to provide often ad hoc support – particularly aimed at vulnerable families.

## **1. COVID-19 and national Government responses as a catalyst for furthering socio-economic inequalities**

### **1.2 COVID-19 and associated lockdowns increased vulnerabilities and socio-economic inequalities.**

These inequalities were felt intersectionally and combined with a range of other crises

An increased number of families sought help during COVID-19 (for instance in accessing food), with job losses and financial strains prevalent amongst marginalized and vulnerable young people.

## **1. COVID-19 and national Government responses as a catalyst for furthering socio-economic inequalities**

**Young people's lives were impacted dramatically, particularly their ability to:**

- learn and access relevant training and skills;
- access healthy and nutritious food;
- be able to exercise and socialise (i.e. access play and leisure);
- continue developing their confidence and be mentally well.

# Education Sector

## **2. Impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable young people's access to education and related adaptations**

Overall - The pandemic dramatically impacted access to education, which is intrinsically connected to access to food, play, socialisation, welfare and overall mental wellbeing.

Impacts unfolded in line with other vulnerabilities including **the digital divide and home conditions that made learning challenging** – with all of these factors having in many cases devastating impacts on young people's learning and life trajectories.

## **2. Impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable young people's access to education and related adaptations**

### **2.1 Education was the most-affected sector with long-lasting cross-sectoral impacts for young people's lives and wellbeing.**

COVID-19 responses in the education sector felt confused and disorganised & most schools and teachers were unprepared.

Various schemes and policies introduced by the government had unequal impacts.

State schools' core budgets were not increased during the pandemic, and many used their other budgets to fill funding shortfalls or used fundraising to fill gaps (for example to purchase IT equipment).

## **2. Impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable young people's access to education and related adaptations**

Several challenges emerged such as differential loss of learning spanning across primary, secondary, vocational skills and special educational needs schools + food and welfare.

The crucial role of teachers and schools should be highlighted. Teachers went beyond their traditional responsibility.

Schools also stepped in to coordinate efforts as to identify families at risk and not being able to access Internet, digital devices and food.

## **2. Impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable young people's access to education and related adaptations**

**2.2 The pandemic and associated lockdowns exposed significant digital divides and digital illiteracy, as well as a systematic lack of preparedness for pivoting to online or hybrid learning.**

Most schools neither had the physical spaces, nor the relevant digital platforms, to deal with physical restrictions within schools and deliver remote learning.

The steep learning curve had significant implications as Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) experimentations resulted in uncertainties and forced adaptability for learners.

The digital divide and attainment gaps were found to be prominent in remote learning experiences of most deprived communities and young people living in monetary poor households.

Accessibility challenges were exacerbated by home conditions but also the closure of other learning spaces (typically libraries)

## **2. Impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable young people's access to education and related adaptations**

Community engagement approach was adopted with parents' online help centres, specific training programs and guidebooks introduced.

Arrangements also occurred within households and social networks

Keeping learning momentum was key and remaining in touch with families was also a way for schools to maintain their welfare duties (e.g. through hand-delivering learning packs to vulnerable families).

Collaboration between schools and local authorities was pivotal and revealed a certain flexibility in providing different forms of learning.

## **2. Impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable young people's access to education and related adaptations**

In terms of digital resources, local support mechanisms, driven by charities and communities but also schools, helped provide vulnerable children with devices and tackled the issue of internet access (speed and costs).

This included initiatives led by schools, charities, faiths groups and local authorities to secure funding to get dongles and distribute tablets and computers (particularly pre-owned laptops).

Support also came from private companies.

## **2. Impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable young people's access to education and related adaptations**

### **2.3 The home setting and learning from home presented particular challenges for some vulnerable young people**

Issue of overcrowded houses, with several siblings, where electronic devices were shared or where Internet access was (not) supporting simultaneously connected devices.

Skills matter here, not only in regard to the ability, time and/or resources of parents to support their children's learning, but also to liaise efficiently with the school.

Home learning was extremely difficult for vulnerable young people and this was also related to being isolated and not being able to seek adequate support. The ad-hoc efforts of schools and teachers were often highly localised and therefore young people in some areas were able to cope better than in others.

## **2. Impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable young people's access to education and related adaptations**

### **2.4 COVID-19 also impacted general learning, vocational courses and demographic inequalities.**

Profound impacts on vocational training and young people preparing and sitting GCSEs and A levels.

Young people in more disadvantaged areas were more likely to emerge worse in terms of 'learning loss' as well as being disadvantaged in attempts to mitigate impacts of COVID-19 on examination processes

The pandemic impacted young people's mental health with these impacts continuing post-lockdown.

# Food Sector

### **3. Impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable young people's access to food and related adaptations**

Overall - Access to food was severely impacted and food insecurity increased, along with rising difficulties accessing a balanced diet.

Housing insecurity and mental health also intersected with challenges in securing nutritious food (cost of living crises)

### **3. Impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable young people's access to food and related adaptations**

#### **3.1 Food poverty was exacerbated during and after the pandemic amongst monetary-poor households.**

Reliance on school meals was significantly disrupted during lockdowns periods.

Government schemes (such as FSM vouchers) provided some support but did not fully alleviate the pressures of food poverty. Additionally, not all food retailers accepted FSM vouchers.

Lack of coordination of government responses (particularly the non-provision of food during holidays) led to a range of local adaptative responses led by schools; charities, religious and faith groups in partnership and food banks.

### **3. Impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable young people's access to food and related adaptations**

#### **3.2 Difficulties in accessing food, particularly nutritious food, combined with online-learning limiting movements and the closure of sport facilities affected young people's lives.**

The quality of food in some food banks and food parcels was not always high, with a higher-than-desired proportion of (ultra-)processed foods being distributed by some.

Children's eating habits altered, in part leading to an increase in obesity.

### **3. Impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable young people's access to food and related adaptations**

**3.3 Experiences of food changed, as the combination of lockdown and restricted mobilities meant that individual self-sufficiency towards producing and preparing food increased.**

Change of eating habits driven by financial rationales, typically stricter budgeting, less impulse buying, preferences for non-perishable and inexpensive food, and a reduction in meat and diary consumption.

Families' attitudes and practices towards food, with an increase interest in cooking, experimenting with new recipes and consuming non-perishable food products.

Online videos posted on social media promoted cooking activities to engage communities' solidarity. Organisations and charities specialising in food and healthy living stepped in to provide such resources.

# Play/leisure Sector

## **4. Impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable young people's access to play /leisure and related adaptations**

Overall - Play and leisure were by far the most ignored aspects of young people's lives in terms of the national government response.

Little considerations given to play/leisure and the longer-term impact on their development and mental wellbeing.

For young people living in monetary poor conditions, such restrictions on their everyday lives were even harsher.

## **4. Impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable young people's access to play /leisure and related adaptations**

### **4.1 Play was not a priority for government spending and policies either before or during the pandemic.**

Funding support packages focused on leisure, and especially sport and sports facilities (including those also aimed at adults).

Organisations such as adventure playgrounds did not receive funding, despite playing a key role during the pandemic for vulnerable young people (becoming gathering spaces and providing places to go but also food and educational resources).

## **4. Impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable young people's access to play /leisure and related adaptations**

### **4.2 The lack of play/leisure options had a detrimental impact on young people's development and health.**

Not being able to play and have leisure was connected with not being allowed to socialise and interact with others.

Closures and social distancing restrictions in schools, playgrounds, leisure centres and other spaces, as well as limited opportunities within homes, meant that play and leisure were particularly curtailed for vulnerable young people living in small homes, without gardens and outdoor areas.

## 4. Impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable young people's access to play /leisure and related adaptations

Socialising outside being restricted, the bedroom became the primary play area, heightening the significance of e-gaming and making the digital realm key to socialization for many young people.

While this led to significant negative impacts, it also played a key role in young people's resilience and ability to sustain forms of social interactions.

However, not all were equal in accessing online play due to the issue of the digital divide and cost of data. Young people experiencing intersectional disadvantages were more vulnerable to digital leisure exclusions.

## **4. Impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable young people's access to play /leisure and related adaptations**

### **4.3 Young people did engage in alternative forms of indoor/outdoor playing.**

Children forged adaptations, such as by reclaiming neighbourhood streets and re-appropriating them as spaces of interactive play.

These processes were not implemented on a larger scale or supported by local authorities (e.g. through play streets schemes for example).

Creativity and adaptability emerged in various temporary small-scale adaptations of outdoor spaces and community streets that often involved children and adults.

## **4. Impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable young people's access to play /leisure and related adaptations**

Playworkers and play organisations remained engaged in developing innovative ways of gathering children to play online;

Through various support measures, they also arranged the delivery of play and food parcels to those in need.

In some cases, groups of organisations (e.g. faith-based, community, schools, Police, playworkers) came together to provide resources and support, all co-delivered through play spaces and activities.

## **4. Impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable young people's access to play /leisure and related adaptations**

**4.4 The reduction of play, leisure and social interactions opportunities led to a range of adaptations based on versatility, and improvisations (which included in some instances bypassing authorities' regulations).**

Many young people (teenagers and above) used public and semi-public spaces to meet despite restrictions, often facing the risk of fines. This led to breaking boundaries as a form of coping.

# Ignored and abandoned

## 5. Ignored voices and an abandoned generation?

The voices of (especially vulnerable) children and young people in England were mostly ignored, as this age group was neither considered as a priority nor 'at-risk' from a public health perspective

Young people were abandoned but also targeted by divisive health discourses (at least as presented by some parts of the media and in some social media).

The lack of support, post-pandemic, reinforced this feeling.

## 5. Ignored voices and an abandoned generation?

The impact of the pandemic will have detrimental consequences for many children and young in the short and long-term, with many of these not yet visible.

The pandemic led to the rise of a COVID-19 generation who feels abandoned and not supported by authorities.

The challenges facing this generation exacerbated by the on-going cost of living and inflation crisis with noticeable inequalities amongst regions in England, and between different demographic groups (particularly in terms of income, ethnicity and dis/ability).

*The role of the PANEX-YOUTH project continues here as lessons, recommendations and possible solutions need to be constructed for and with young people – a key focus for WP4, which involves detailed action research with young people.*