

Survey report on youth leaders in Europe

Update: 03.08.2020

Youth leaders across Europe were invited to partake in a survey undertaken by Evi Rodemann (part of the leadership team of the informal youth network in Europe), which referred to the current crisis of Covid-19.

The questionnaire via Google Form was open for 6 weeks (May to mid-June 2020). It was spread within the European Network of Youth Ministries (EYMN) and via Facebook.

38 youth leaders partook in this survey. The questions were geared towards the youth leader itself plus concerning his or her team and their responses to this pandemic.

A short outline of this report:

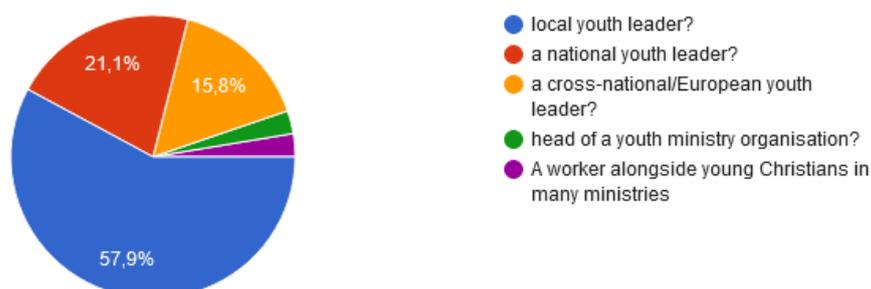
- 1) The participants
- 2) The youth leader's ministry
- 3) The youth leader and his/her team
- 4) Current needs and future
- 5) Support of a European network
- 6) Take away, recommendations and questions

These are some of the findings and observations:

1. The participants

a) Kind of youth leaders

Are you a
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The participants were asked to choose one of the following categories:

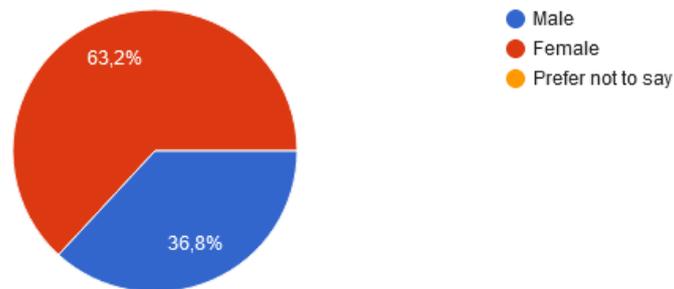
- Local youth leader
- National youth leader
- Cross-national/European youth leader
- Head of a youth ministry organisation
- Worker alongside young Christians in many ministries

The majority (57,9%) are local youth leaders. The next largest group are national youth leaders with 21,1% followed by cross-national and European youth leaders (15,8%).

b) The gender of the youth leaders

My gender is:

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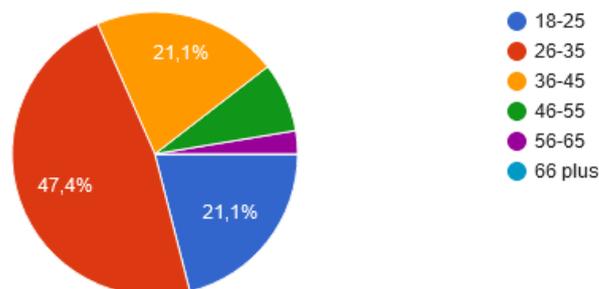


63,2% were men, 36,8% were women who responded. This also mirrors the gender distribution within the European Youth Ministry Network.

c) The age of the youth leaders

My age bracket is:

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The biggest group are the youth leaders between 26-35 years of age, followed by 18-25 (21,1%) and 36-45 (21,1%).

d) Their nationalities

The youth workers come from various nations: Germany, Romania, US, UK, Czech Republic, Poland, Belgian, Netherlands, Latvia, Slovenia, Slovakia and Switzerland.

The highest number of participants in this survey come from Germany (10 persons) followed by the US and the UK.

The countries they live in:

Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Slovakia, Poland, Czech Republic, UK, Latvia, France, Lebanon, Netherlands, Slovenia and Romania.

2. The youth leader´s ministry

a) Have you been able to continue doing youth ministry? If yes, in what format?

It was an open question, which was responded to by everyone.

Some reoccurring answers:

Most participants have answered with a yes. They have been able to continue doing youth ministry though the format had to radically change.

The format mainly used is the platform Zoom. Next to it, Skype, WhatsApp and Instagram were used.

Via Zoom, youth clubs and small groups were widely offered and worked well until Zoom fatigue started. In addition, online Bible studies, an online network for youth leaders and reading the same book were offered. One started short interactive daily Bible studies, a series of big questions was offered via Youtube and online games, online baking etc.

One person mentioned, "We offer support for local leaders. Going online was a good way to reach more people from all over the country. We started a second round with webinars and are also offering one on one coaching instead of visiting a team of youth workers".

Some commented that quite a few young people never showed up for online meetings. One person also said it was a necessity but not as much fun as gathering face to face.

One youth leader encouraged the youth to think "out of the box" and for example, two young boys started a seeker Bible study online. Another one created a website with resources for churches to use in their youth ministries during lockdown.

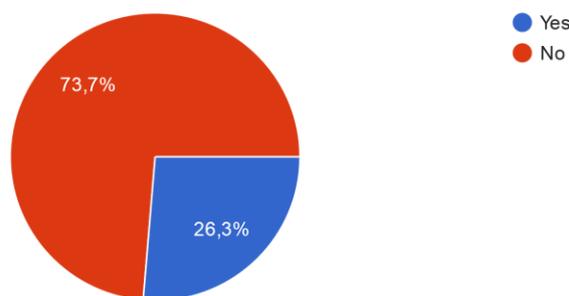
Generally, there was more openness to the Gospel in the first two month (March until roughly the end of April 2020) compared to June and July 2020.

Only one person answered with no and said, she or he could not continue with youth ministry.

b) Have you delivered online sessions for youth before Covid-19?

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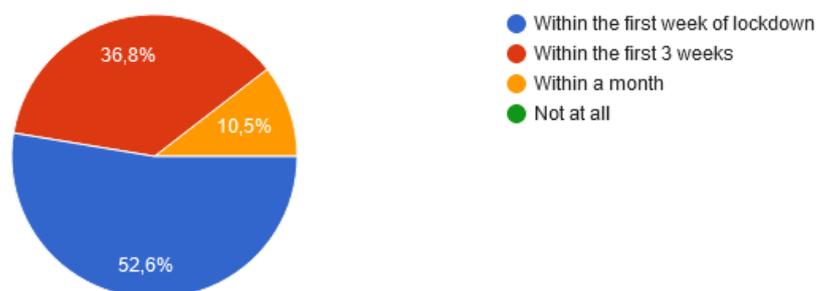


We wanted to find out if the youth leaders had already offered online sessions for youth before Covid-19 which was answered negatively by 73,7%.

c) How fast were you able to deliver online sessions, training etc.?

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We then wanted to know how fast they were able to deliver online sessions and it is great to see that 52,6% were able to deliver within the first week of lockdown, though the lockdown started at different times around Europe.

d) What has been a key in connecting with young people in these "online times"?

The repeated response to this open question was, that having known the young people before the crisis made the big difference.

In general, young people were willing to go online and also become personal there. However, the young people needed to be invited and constantly checked upon. There was no automatism involved. They also needed to catch a vision that they are made for such a time as this and can make a difference, deal with the crisis and move on.

It was much harder to stay in touch with young people who are not from a Christian background and who were not so deeply involved in youth work. The key as always is the relationship and the trust. It also needs perseverance of the youth leader and a willingness to exemplify how to deal with change.

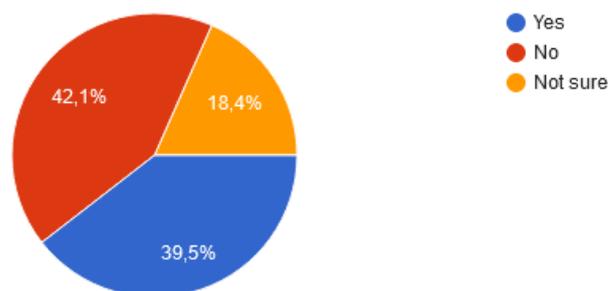
It was also important to offer opportunities to listen to each other, play games and interact. Especially the one on ones became hugely important.

The technical equipment and bandwidth were other plus factors.

e) Have you seen new young people join your ministry during this crisis?

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It is encouraging to see that at least 39,5% said they were able to win new young people into their ministry during this crisis.

3. The youth leader and his/her team

We wanted to find out how the youth leader personally is coping with the crisis and see what has helped in this situation. We also wanted to learn about their teams.

a) How are you dealing with the Covid-19 crisis personally? Is there anything particular that has helped you?

35 responded to this question. Overall, they cope well and have made best use of the time and the opportunities.

The way they are coping:

- Most responses were positive. What helped was having or creating a daily and weekly schedule and having rituals.
- For quite a few this lockdown provided them with an opportunity to get some more rest and not work 150%
- Youth workers saw new opportunities of going online and created a Kids Zoom club, youth meetings and through 1kingmusic.com an online concert in July
- For some who are also parents there was a constant struggle who to give most attention to
- One person mentioned the need of close friends to deeply share with
- One youth worker shared how frustrated he or she was about the situation and coping with the new norm. It took some weeks to cope and have a Jesus encounter. Another one was battling with the spirit of fear
- Being reminded that God is still in control
- Doing more sports
- It was easy for some to adapt to online ministry right away and it is so much harder going back to face to face ministry
- Finding new ways of dealing with more time at hand and use it wisely
- One felt really ill equipped for such a ministry time and was really helped by Carey Nieuwhof's blog and podcast
- Zoom is taking its toll

What has helped them?

- Having family around or the support of their spouses
- Connecting with other youth workers and friends
- Not facing death within their own families due to Covid-19
- To know the vision and what keeps them going
- Focus on goals and change the method, e.g. combine work behind a notebook with (prayer) walks
- Doing sports and being out in nature
- The organisation provided good support by leading and setting guidance and boundaries on how to cope with the Covid-19 situation

b) How is your team dealing with the Covid-19 crisis? Is there anything particular that has helped you?

The various ways the team has been dealing with this crisis:

- Teams have overall been doing well, were able to adapt and be creative in dealing with the situation
- A couple of youth workers said they did not know because there was very little contact and no online meetings
- There has been a great deal of discouragement across the MENA region. It has been helpful to bring everyone together to talk about things but also bringing in trauma experts who have helped both the youth leaders and the youth
- Lack of motivation
- For some it has been hard to hold people together and go forward as a team
- Some are frustrated with the lack of reaching the youth, also the cancellation of many summer camps
- Weekly team meetings
- Together listen to God and study the Bible and pray together
- The younger the team members are the harder they found the lockdown, also the extroverts suffered more

What has helped?

- Online connections, an intentional community to talk with and share ideas
- Services and youth ministry meetings online
- To have space, experience grace and check ins from other team members
- To give freedom to team members as they all struggled with the implications and not burden them with more work, also explaining the different ways people go through a crisis
- To have an organisation which is supportive of its workers and provides practical tools for coping, ways of doing evangelism etc.
- To be dedicated to make the most out of this and not simply survive
- To be accountable in your low and high moments
- Gracious bosses
- Changing syllabus
- Receiving or sending weekly inspirations

From the responses, it becomes evident that most youth workers spotted the opportunities, adapted and plugged on. Where there was frustration, it was dealt with wisely and the teams supported each other where needed. Youth workers did not just wait out but got hands on, convinced they are important in the work with young people.

c) Where have you seen God work in the midst of Covid-19?

We also wanted to find out where the surprises were. In each situation God does something new and whatever occurs, he is in control. So how was God experienced in this crisis?

35 people responded to this question. In general, people have seen God at work. Either within themselves or using them to bless others. They have also experienced their young people getting more serious with God.

Some quotes:

- Many young youth members were able to start reading Bible more and undertaking spiritual disciplines
- God granted opportunities to reach out
- Some kids for the first time started reading the Bible
- The church, which previously was scared to reach out to her neighbours, is now reaching out in amazing ways. The number of people using some of our online channels has gone up by ten times. In some cases where we were meant to get youth together for a training and couldn't, they have led the way in reaching out to each other and creating community in a way that would never have happened during a one week training.
- Openness in times of trouble. Caring for others in time of need
- God is getting me closer to his heart
- Youth met every day for weeks praying and reading the Bible together
- We started a buddy project. Working together with a local organization that works with underprivileged families in Brussels. We connected our youth to those families to help with homework, translating... And now we are looking for ways to continue this.
- We experienced this as a growth and change accelerator, people are asking God how he wants to use them in this new time
- God did something in me helping to reflect, rest and re-prioritize
- Very young ones have come to me for learning about listening to God.
- Team spirit
- We had many kids come closer to God due to the fear/uncertainty they started feeling. We saw quite a few new non-believers connecting to our youth. What we are probably most happy about is that God answered our prayers in the following: we have been praying and encouraging our "kids" to share their faith with others and step into leading. During Covid-19, God made this happen - the kids started sharing their hope in Christ with others and started stepping into leading some great activities and discipling others. We are so grateful for this.
- God has been faithful all through. Creating and seizing new opportunities. First it was more quiet and restful but then the ideas came, more reach out to neighbours, getting things online
- Many cool online-streams and possibilities for online meetings were there
- In the creativity of "our" local youth workers. They are planning so many good offers for their youth

- Our world has been turned upside down. I believe God is up to something. He wants to use this crisis as a wake-up call to help people understand it's not money, success, or governments that are the answer to our problems. No, our only hope is in Jesus Christ. So there's an incredible open window right now for Christian workers to take the gospel to the lost and hurting people all over the world. And that was even more than possible and visible (during the first few weeks we could observe how Facebook was full of GOD via posts, asked questions, shares of video and setting of church online possibilities.
- A number of blessings: we have had a young person pray aloud for the first time on Zoom, another young person professed faith in Jesus. Praise God!
- We see that churches now feel the urgency of changing and are looking for new ways to be a community of Christ in these times.
- There has been more pastoral support and care than before and a real emphasis on checking in regularly on everyone. We've also had far more time to pray so we've seen people's spiritual lives growing through this as they trust and pray
- People who normally don't go to church are now interested and are seeking faith in a crisis

4. Current needs and future

a) What do you see are the biggest needs among young people right now?

Every one of the 38 responded to this question.

Here is the top list of needs mentioned multiple times:

- Care and belong. Feeling connected and not just online. Experiencing love and acceptance
- Personal contact in an offline community and friendships
- Encouragement in the experienced trauma
- A place to be, to spend time together
- Help to stay motivated and disciplined in many areas (like school and exams, Bible reading, daily responsibilities...)
- Getting them outside and stay healthy
- Hot topics like sexuality, atheism, environment, addiction, loneliness, purpose, friends
- Emotional/Mental health support
- To be challenged to care about others and follow Jesus no matter what the cost
- Quality Christian content on internet and social media in local languages (not only English), accessible training for youth leaders and church leaders
- Address the fears, the loss of opportunities, boredom

b) What do you think would be worth developing online even during no-restrictions periods in the future?

Following answers were provided and grouped:

- Streaming services
- Resourcing and training leaders and train leaders online
- Interconnecting with other youth ministries
- Reaching those who won't be at the youth club
- Resources for isolated youth who cannot meet in person with other believers normally. We need to find creative and secure ways to create community for isolated young secret believers
- Games and how to keep young people attracted to youth program
- A mix of offline and online events on Instagram
- A network for Community, a resources platform with intelligent filter, coaching and counselling for youth workers through professional teams through live chat, YouTube videos 10 minutes infotainment with personal application
- Podcasts
- Continue with online conversations
- To check if training should be offered online or offline and reduce travelling
- Zoom conferences and e-learning

5. In what ways can a European Network help?

Twenty people responded to this question.

A few needs and wishes were identified:

- Offer online tools like Zoom for free
- Offer inspiration to youth leaders and see what works in other contexts and countries
- Develop strategies to meet in real life
- Offer shared resources like best practices for doing stuff well online
- Offer a retreat for youth workers in 2021
- Have youth resources and materials being translated into other European languages
- Providing ideas and inspiration for the soul of the leader
- Offer mentoring in this situation
- Offer ideas on how the summer could be used as many camps cannot take place
- Provide answers on how to best deal with Covid-19
- Help leaders not to burn out in these challenging circumstances and keep up the inspiration when so much of what we used to do has fallen away and might not be resurrected
- Some churches lack an understanding on how to deal with young people and this situation makes it worse

- Role model as leaders to a young generation on how to engage wisely and proactive in a crisis. There are too many paralyzed youth leaders
- Pray for youth workers

6. Take aways, recommendations and questions

The top take aways:

- God is in control – with or without a crisis. As we give our best to minister to young people, we are in for some godly surprises.
- Relationships with young people are key. A crisis only shows how strong these relationships are. One on one encounters and follow-up are essential now to prevent young people leaving the ministry.
- Youth ministry has become digital with full speed and the impact will be wider than before. Online does not substitute the offline though.
- Sharing resources is key so that mutual learning can take place.

Recommendations and next steps:

- The need to share resources: We encourage youth ministries to inspire and help each other where possible. One group cannot tackle this crisis only. Solidarity is more important than brand.
- The need to develop online resources for youth engagement
- The need to develop (online) friendships among youth leaders: We encourage friendships with other professional youth workers to support each other on a heart level / soul care as often people feel lonely within a crisis.
- We encourage youth leaders to relax as if the work does not depend on them and to strive as if the work does depend on them. It is important to find the right balance and take precautions now not to experience a breakdown of teams or burnouts.

Questions:

- What could be your next step to share your learnings with others?
- Who will you reach out to and foster friendship?
- How can you as a youth leader do face to face without breaking data protection rules and talking to a young person alone online?
- How do you make sure you rest and relax in all the demands?

For further questions on this report or on the European Youth Ministry Network, please write to evirodemann2@gmail.com.

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