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YOUNG LEADERS DEVELOPMENT
SUMMIT POST-COVID-19

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(Un)masked

Reflections on Self and Collective Responsibility during the COVID-19 Pandemic

ASIA-EUROPE
FOUNDATION

Imprint

Note
The editors have tried their best to keep the language of this Publication's essays as close as possible to their authors' personal writing style.

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Foreword

'Mountains and rivers apart, we all live under the same sky.' (山川异域、 風月同天)

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in January 2020, the Japan Youth Development Association (JYDA) sent boxes filled with medical supplies to China as a symbol of solidarity. The short ancient Chinese poem, written on the sides of the boxes, quickly went viral on social media. Soon after, the pandemic became a global crisis affecting everyone around the world and significantly reversing the progress made towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Today, more than two years later, we have realised that countries and people have been contending with this multi-faceted crisis and its enduring effects in very different ways. The COVID-19 pandemic has been an unprecedented collective experience shared by all across national borders and yet unique to every country, every social group and every individual.

I am very pleased to introduce this Publication which brings to light the experience and reflections of young people from Asia and Europe. It is essential to hear from the youth as they have been disproportionately affected by the social, emotional and economic impact of the pandemic. Their mental health and well-being were strongly impacted by the closure of higher education institutions, social distancing measures, job insecurity and a general sense of uncertainty about their future. This Publication is an invaluable account of how these young Asians and Europeans have faced these challenges and understood their roles in their communities at a critical time during the pandemic. It is a unique snapshot capturing their reflections and feelings through their own words as they have been navigating complex ethical questions around self and collective responsibility.

This Publication is also a strong testimonial of young people's resilience and solidarity during these past two years. These young people have been at the forefront of volunteering and developing creative and inclusive solutions to support their communities in Asia and Europe. Their writings help us to understand the roles they have been taking and the key roles they are ready to play in building back a resilient and inclusive post-pandemic world.

Youth across Asia and Europe are diverse and so are their lived experiences and perceptions of the pandemic. Influenced by their respective Asian and European cultures, these young people are also interconnected global citizens who often share a strong sense of common responsibility which goes beyond borders. This important sense of unity in diversity is crucial to shape an inclusive post-COVID-19 world. I strongly believe that young people have a vital role to play in building bridges and fostering mutual understanding between our two continents to address common global challenges and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

As I have introduced these few words with a poem from Asia, I would like to conclude with a quote from Europe. Just before the Spanish flu pandemic a hundred years ago, pioneer impressionist writer Virginia Woolf wrote: 'One of the signs of passing youth is the birth of a sense of fellowship with other human beings as we take our place among them.' (Hours in a Library)

It is now the time to look ahead together and pave the way towards Sustainable Development in a post-COVID-19 World. It is essential to involve all these young people who live apart but share a sense of fellowship 'under the same sky'.

I hope that you will find inspiration in these young people's writings and will enjoy discovering their colourful, almost impressionist portraits.

The draft of this foreword was prepared by my young colleagues, Freya and Quentin, coordinators of ASEF's Youth projects. I would like to acknowledge the authors of this beautiful text as this is an example showcasing the young generation's readiness to drive forward the future of Asia and Europe in the 21st century.

Ambassador Toru MORIKAWA
Executive Director
Asia-Europe Foundation

After more than two years, we are hopefully seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, as we are slowly coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic. Maybe this is the right time to take a step back and assess how we coped with this unforeseen emergence and the impact it has had on us both individually, but also on our societies.

I am very honoured to share some thoughts at the occasion of this publication that young people from ASEM Member Countries have put together to share their experiences and give us their different perspectives. After all they have been impacted in their own particular way.

Let us first honour all the victims and casualties the pandemic has caused, most of all the doctors and health workers who have fought at the front line, both in Asia and Europe, speaking truth to authorities about the pandemic, making great sacrifices, including by giving up their own lives to save others. Let us remember how communities have been struck, and how unprepared and helpless we were in front of this new challenge as we had no idea where it came from and how it should be addressed.

It seems to me that the emergence of the virus has laid bare many of the contradictions and difficulties that we face globally, both among, but also within countries.

Right from the beginning the origin of the virus was unnecessarily politicised at the expense of a more scientific approach which put considerable pressure on international organisations like the World Health Organization (WHO). While we may claim that this crisis was unexpected, we need

to recognise the warnings that had been given to us earlier. Could we have been better prepared? Has the way we intrude into and exploit nature got anything to do with the transmission of viruses?

While the virus spread over the world and reached the most remote areas of the planet, it appeared quickly that all health systems, independent how well-equipped and developed, had difficulties coping. Not only were the COVID-19-related casualties increasing without control, but the impact on other health-related services were equally sizable, to the extent that other patients could not always get the expected services in due time. The introduction of large-scale lockdowns and quarantines has had an impact on our mental health, the long-term effects of which can only be measured over time.

After having endured difficult times and restrictions on their private freedoms, public opinion has reacted to the changing attitudes of policy makers and health officials, as they often struggled to find the right response, including the right balance between protecting the population from greater harm caused by the virus, and the economic development that was hampered by the lockdowns.

Even though these phenomena manifested themselves differently across countries, we could observe that authorities had less problems convincing people to wear masks in public or get vaccines in those countries where collective well-being has traditionally been more valued over individual rights. However, the public was more prone to express their frustration over the limits imposed on their individual freedom in

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Acknowledgements

countries where individual rights have always been more cherished.

Finally, after a long-wait, vaccines were developed, but disparities were once again laid open. Rather than ensuring wide access in the most effective and efficient way, geopolitics came into play and many countries engaged in the so-called "vaccine diplomacy", which did not help overcome differences but rather widened the gap.

Meanwhile, after two long years, we finally have a better understanding of the virus itself, its evolution, and its spreading. While some countries maintain a zero-COVID-19 strategy, most have started to live with it as health systems are now in a better position to manage the impacts of the virus, and we can hope to find our way back to our former 'normal' lives.

Undoubtably, the pandemic has left its marks, and has exacerbated some trends that had already kicked in earlier. As mentioned so often, we have changed some of our attitudes and have become more used to working from home and we now use different technologies more frequently. But have we really learned our lesson? Will we be able to behave more responsibly when the next virus strikes, as it is just waiting patiently around the corner?

I certainly hope so and I have great faith in the future generations that they will be better equipped to look at global challenges in a comprehensive way and will not be distracted by individual considerations but rather the overall good of all of us.

Ambassador Leon FABER
Deputy Executive Director
Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)

Introduction

About the 4th ASEF Young Leaders Summit
Implemented as a virtual programme between
February and November 2021, the 4th ASEF
Young Leaders Summit (ASEFYLS4) was
designed to bring together young professionals
and students from ASEM[1] Countries, to
learn and collaborate on Leadership and the
Sustainable Development Goals through
the topic of 'Sustainable Development in a
Post-COVID-19 World'. The 10-month long
virtual programme welcomed over 180 young
participants from all 51 ASEM countries.
Participants developed 'Leadership in Action'
projects to tackle the following 4 SDGs:

– SDG3: Good Health & Well-being
– SDG4: Quality Education
– SDG8: Decent Work & Economic Growth
– SDG13: Climate Action

Visit the project website to learn more about the
ASEFYLS4 Project and its outcomes, as well as
the young participants from Asia and Europe.

About this Publication
This Publication is an outcome of the 4th
ASEF Young Leaders Summit (ASEFYLS4).
During the 'Knowledge Building Phase' of the
programme, the participants completed a
number of individual and group assignments.
In March 2021, as a follow up to their learning
session on SDG3 – Good Health & Well-being,
the participants were tasked with writing op-eds
to explore their individual experience amidst the
pandemic, as well as their observations on youth
around them, focusing on the questions:
– Do we owe each other anything as global
citizens?

– If so, what are the ethical obligations of the
various stakeholders – in this case YOUth – to
keep our societies healthy & safe during the
pandemic?

– Where do you see an individual rights and/or
collective responsibility approach?

– In which way do these two approaches
contradict each other and is there a middle
ground?

Through the ASEFYLS4 Participants' own
writings, this Publication is a unique historical
snapshot which explores these young Asians
and Europeans' perspectives on the topic as
they were tackling this unprecedented global
challenge.

These op-eds were written over 1.5 years before
the publication of this compilation, and the
COVID-19 pandemic has thoroughly evolved
during that time. However, the editors see the
value in documenting the youth experience as a
historical snapshot.

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[1] The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is an
informal process of dialogue and cooperation
bringing together the 27 European Union
member states, 3 other European countries, and
the European Union with 21 Asian countries and
the ASEAN Secretariat.

Visual explainer

The portraits of the authors in this publication are each made up of photos of all the other authors, presenting both the individual and society. No individual is able to exist without society, and all individuals together are the society. They are all inseparably connected.
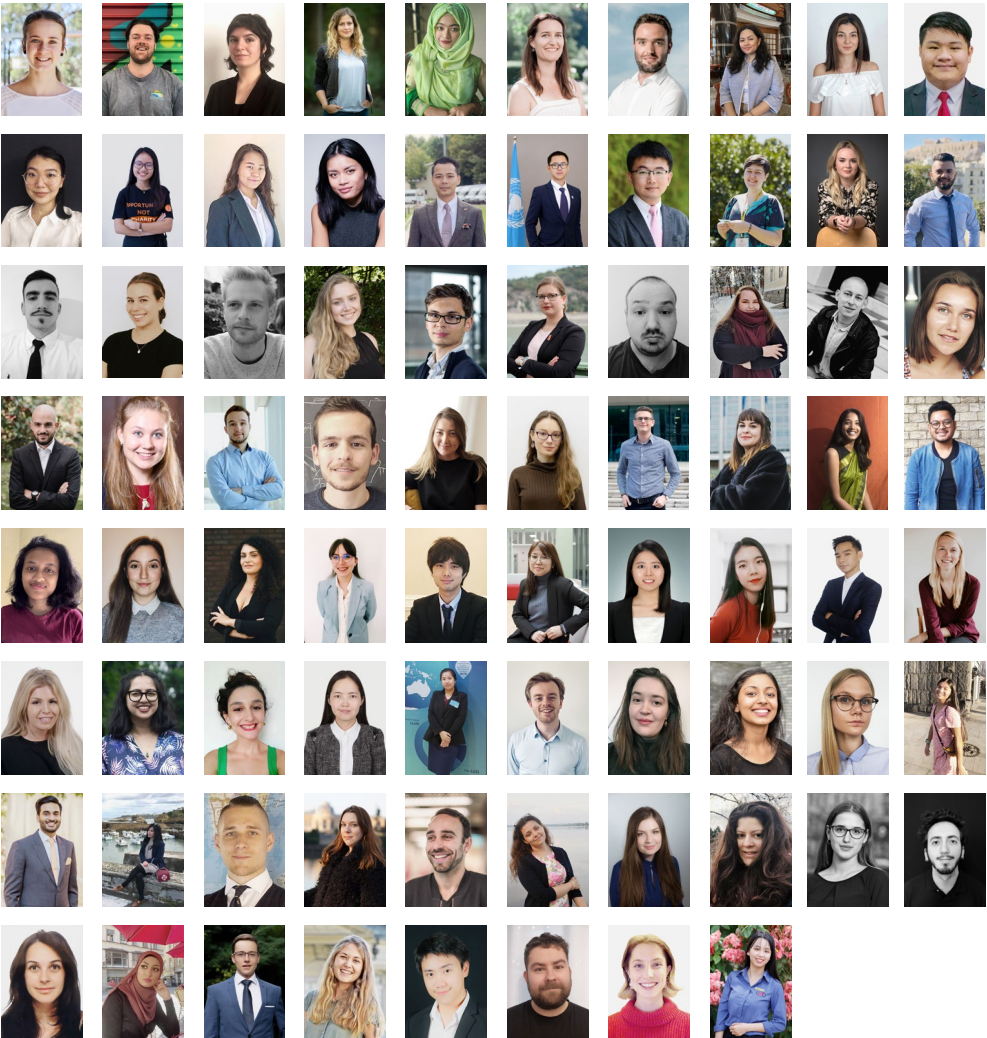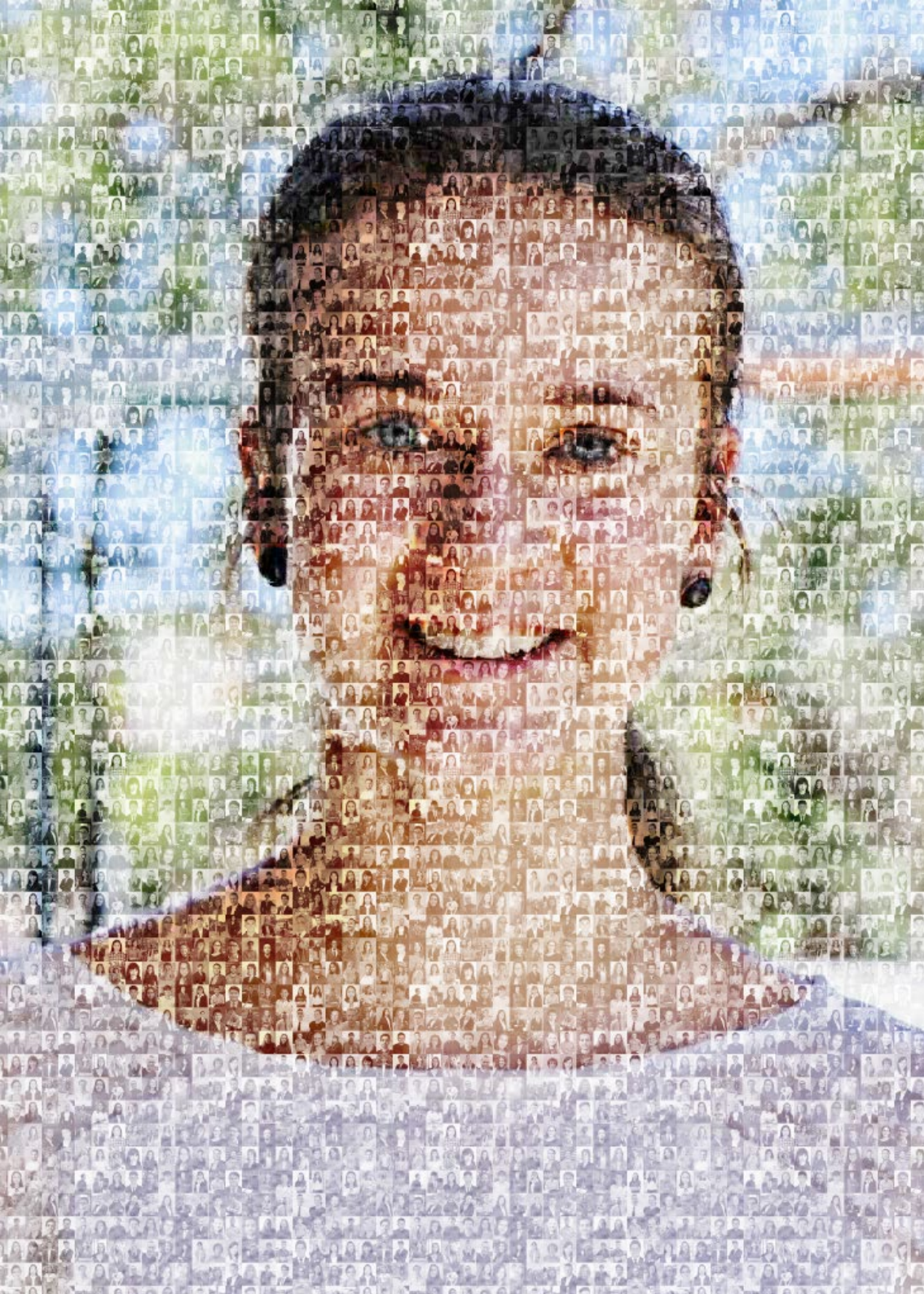
Kelsey Gray, Australia

Mateship: between collective responsibility at home and global citizenship

The Australian Open was underway, the tourist town of Byron Bay swelled with intrastate travellers, and millions of young people were preparing for a return to face-to-face classes at university. My state of New South Wales had gone more than 40 days without any cases of community transmission. Whilst plans for the vaccine rollout had been announced for the end of the month, to most young people, it was just a cursory news announcement – COVID-19 had passed, and life seemed to return to an apparent normality. This was February 2021 in Australia. On February 12th, the Victorian Premier Dan Andrews announced an emergency five-day "snap lockdown" after a new cluster of cases emerged from a hotel used for quarantining returned travellers.

Immediately, the grumbling that it was an 'over-reaction' took off. The media ignited scores of people bringing back the calls of 'Dictator Dan', an epithet which circulated widely during Victoria's lockdown period from March to October 2021, which was one of the longest and strictest lockdowns imposed on citizens anywhere in the world (Jose, 2021). There were cries that the snap lockdown was a dramatic over-reaction and disproportionate response. 'Look at Europe – they have hundreds of cases every day and restrictions are nothing like ours' was the most popular refrain to be heard from protesting dissidents.

Thus, we reach the present day, March 2021, where the Australian public is eager to leave behind the lockdown ghosts of 2020 and go back to large crowds and social gatherings. Indeed, the science and medical data does support a return to gradual, relative normality.

Australia has been a high-performing nation in terms of managing the pandemic – my state of 7 million people has recorded just over 5000 cases since January 2020 (NSW Health, 2021). As a whole, citizens were compliant and obeyed with the health directions diligently. Yet one year on, the frustrations and 'lockdown fatigue' are circulating, suggesting compliance with social health measures will subside. We owe each other the collective responsibility to ensure this doesn't happen.

Fulfilling our civic duty ought not to be so difficult. Since March 2020, I have observed young people in Australia being largely respectful of the required measures, and resilient in their behaviour. Why is it so important that we carry this forward throughout 2021? Why, if Australia has been pronounced a world-leader in pandemic management, do we still need to wear masks on public transport? The answer is the same as it was in March 2020 – Australia is a resilient nation, and every stakeholder in society, including youth, has an ethical obligation to keep our society healthy and safe during the pandemic. This includes wearing masks, keeping a distance from each other in crowds, and respecting the limits on numbers for social gatherings.

Of course, these orders raise issues, which all liberal democracies must contend with, as to how best manage the inherent conflict between individual rights and collective responsibility. Individual rights and freedoms are an expected part of Australian society. Those who were reluctant to abide by health orders often did so on the premise of their personal liberties and their 'bodily freedom'. I believe the middle

ground in this conflict is where we find the Australian value of 'mateship' which instils within us a collective responsibility to look out for our fellow 'mates'. Mateship is a uniquely Australian value, and although its relevance may have subsided from the limelight, there is no denying this sort of attitude promotes the civic responsibility we need during a global pandemic. Whilst mateship enforces collective responsibility at home, what about our global citizenship? Australians are geographically isolated but have a strong track record of being good global citizens. Throughout the pandemic, I think our awareness of global issues has increased despite not being able to travel. It's as though the switch to digital communication encouraged us to look abroad and connect with people from different pockets of the world. At the very beginning of 2020, the world united in support for Australia as the Black Summer Bushfires caused devastation and destruction. Throughout May and June, socially distanced protests in support of the Black Lives Matter movement brought thousands of young people onto the streets. It fuelled discussions about racism and the treatment of our First Nations people, which were uncomfortable, but transformative, nonetheless.

It is therefore in our own interests to continue to be good global citizens. Australia has a responsibility in the Pacific to ensure that the years of progress and development in island nations are not wasted. We ought to ensure equitable access to vaccines in our region and share our pandemic response strategies with others. Exercising diplomacy and working with partners will ensure a faster path towards post-pandemic recovery and the reopening of the global economy. Looking out for our neighbours starts at home – how we treat our fellow countrymen will be telling for how Australia engages with the world moving forward. In closing, Michael Shoebridge and Lisa Sharland wrote a compelling piece for the Australian Strategic Policy Institute arguing the case for global citizenship: "what we do here in Australia helps set the foundation and direction of our global and bilateral partnerships, and what we do internationally can change global directions" (Shoebridge and Sharland, 2020).

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Kelsey Grey

Kelsey completed a Bachelor's degree in Law & Science from the University of Newcastle, graduating as Valedictorian with the University Medal in 2021. Having started her career as a graduate lawyer, she now works at the Australian Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet as an Adviser within the climate change team. She represented Australia as a Youth Delegate at the United Nations Climate Talks in Bonn (COP23) and has gained experience working across the Asia-Pacific region in a diverse array of professional environments, including the United Nations, academia, not-for-profit environmental organisations, climate litigation research, and commercial law. She attended the 9th Model ASEM in 2019, representing China. Kelsey is an ASEFEdu alumnus.

James Tait, Australia

Health is foundational

Health. For an idea so simple, it is deeply misunderstood. So foundational, yet easily forgotten. So revolutionary, yet ignored. Of late, the humble idea of ‚health' has made a return to the cutting-edge of science, research, policy and community life. Now, with that momentum colliding with COVID-19, it may just be the turning point needed in the global pursuit of sustainability, equality, and justice.

My 2020 was spent deep in thought or in books, on a cool shaded porch under a gently flaking paperbark tree in Melbourne, Australia. It was a quiet, beautiful way to live despite being in the craziest, most chaotic, scariest year of my life to-date. In short, I studied health, sustainability, and economics at a Masters-level, during a global pandemic, in one of the toughest lockdowns in the world. This all happened whilst economies worldwide collapsed, and climate change impacts kept rolling in.

It's fair to say a lot happened whilst I watched cockatoos and lorikeets chirp and squawk their way through the paperbark tree's clumsy branches. And to be honest, most days I felt unhealthy, caged-in and sluggish.

And yet, through it all, that idea of ‚health' kept popping up. Of course, it was prominent in public health studies. But it happened again in economics, and in sustainability studies. Then the media and politicians wouldn't stop mentioning it. Then I couldn't stop thinking about it.

At first it was perplexing. Then it became profound. Upon further reflection under that paperbark tree, my personal life, my social life, and my academic life all confirmed the profundity of it all.

So, I'll unpack all that now, and hopefully find the words to convey the warm, fuzzy, excited feeling good ol' 'health' gives me now.

My Personal Experience of COVID-19 and Health

Melbourne, Australia went into a number of lockdowns in 2020, with the longest lasting roughly 4 months. It was touted to be one of the toughest lockdowns in the world. The 'collective health' of everyone was made priority. In doing so, we were told that some things were more 'essential' to survival than others. I was lucky enough to receive welfare support, meaning I could buy food, pay bills and afford rent. My studies moved online almost overnight.

I was one of the lucky ones. And yet, my mental health declined, and my energy levels and quality of life with it. From there, my social life, educational performance, and spirituality all too suffered.

My view of a healthy life thus changed. I had traditional 'health' but was the least healthy I had been in years. My friends had similar experiences too. Physical health is our foundation, but it doesn't lead to a good life alone. Physical health needs mental health, social health, spiritual health, financial health, educational health and more to lead to a full, good and meaningful life.

And, amazingly, my academic studies echoed this.

Health is a Revolutionary Idea in Research, Science and Policy

Studying during a pandemic has its advantages: you have a lot of time to dig deep into the big problems, and the big innovations going on.

The problems? A lot of crises: COVID-19, economic recession, the climate crisis, ecological breakdown, global poverty and inequality, social unrest, and more.

The promising innovations? I'll list my favourites below, which all funnily enough feature a wholistic idea of 'health'.

Raworth's Doughnut Economics

Economist Kate Raworth's 'doughnut' economy received global acclaim for its conception of a socially just, sustainable economy. An economy must respect upper planetary boundaries (ecological health) and lower social boundaries (societal health). Interestingly, societal health combines physical health, food, education, water, political voice and more; the conditions perhaps needed for a good, healthy, community life?

Social Determinants of Health

The Social Determinants of Health, in a similar way to the lower bound of Raworth's doughnut economy, looks at health as dependent on all factors of an individual's life:
(Russell, 2016)

An individual's health is defined as much by their behaviour, as the built-environment, community, society and economy around them. This extends health as not only a priority of public health and medical fields, but to the jobs of urban planners, politicians, and beyond. COVID-19 has made this all the more familiar.

Well-Being Economics

In a similar line of thought, the WHO's recently touted 'well-being economy' reflects these very ideas, inspired by the COVID-19 pandemic. Hans Kluge, Regional Director, WHO European Regional Office, put it powerfully:

Recovery must lead to a different economy. We call it an economy of well-being.
An economy of well-being means:

– An economy that puts people in the centre.
– An economy that provides a safety net for everyone and protects front line workers.
– An economy that contributes to a green climate and environmental sustainability.
– An economy where public health is seen as a driver of jobs in the health sector, particularly for young people and as a safeguard of economy, security and peace.

Beyond defeating the disease, the great test all countries will soon face is whether current feelings of common purpose will shape society after the crisis... We must mobilize the will from politicians and people alike to create a better society which is fair and safe for everyone. An economy where we leave no one behind." (Kluge, 2020).

Sustainable Development Goals

And, of course, the SDGs too are an innovation that look to establish sustainable, just, prosperous societies. Taking from the lead of the previous three examples, perhaps each of the SDGs could easily be thought of as a goal, or a type, of societal health?

Individual Rights VS Social/Collective Good?

Of course, not everyone agrees that society-wide measures for the sake of societal health is the 'right' thing to do. Often, ideas of mask wearing, lockdown and relinquishing travel debates devolve to battles of 'individual rights' against 'collective good'. Is one 'better' than the other?

In my mind, from the above experiences and learnings, individual rights can only be upheld (and the good life pursued) if you have your health. Having freedom, rights and political voice is a definite part of a healthy, good life.

However, physical health is a foundation of all other aspects of the wholistic, expanded understanding of a 'healthy life'. With this, measures to ensure the health of the collective good, whilst tough, are in line with my understandings of individual rights and freedoms.

Without health, you have nothing. Lack of freedom and rights for me, is lack of health and autonomy from my health.

The Upshot?

This is all a deep conversation that requires a lot of reading, thinking and talking. Maybe I could do some more of this under my lovely paperbark tree on my cool porch. Or, maybe, thanks to a COVID-normal Melbourne, I could do it under a lovely gum tree in the park, with some good friends.

And maybe I'll think about a beautiful quote attributed to Confucius: "A healthy person wants 10,000 things. A sick person wants just one."

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James Tait
James is pursuing Ecological Economics studies at the University of Melbourne, where he also works as Climate Adaptation Researcher. James has extensive experience working with Australian entrepreneurs and start-ups with whom he collaborates to problem-solve in civic, policy and private spaces. James's work focuses on empowering local communities and their leaders to, think globally and act locally' by researching how community services like foodbanks and homeless shelters are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Patrizia Fink, Austria

Ethical obligations: how youth walk the talk

One year ago, Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz initiated the first lockdown in Austria on 16 March 2020. Austrian citizens were eager and motivated to stay inside, reduce social contacts and wash their hands regularly to prevent a rapid increase in COVID-19 cases (Roache, 2020). After less than a month, non-essential stores were able to open again and on 1 May people were allowed to meet in small groups outside again. When I think back to that time and how cautious I myself have been regarding social contacts and wearing a mask in public, I can only imagine a small percentage of the Austrian population would act the same way now as we did in March 2020. The solidarity among the Austrian community was strong and everyone was hopeful that we could survive this pandemic all together. But I do not believe that anybody in Austria now thinks they owe anybody anything.

Whilst I do feel like we as individuals have responsibility for the spread of COVID-19 not only in a local but also global context, I do not think that everyone is being responsible on the same level. Of course, we cannot expect people to be equally responsible or always act the same, but with the pandemic affecting all countries around the world and similar measures being implemented, one could believe there should be a global consent by now. But the amount of anti-COVID-19 demonstrations that have happened in Austria say the opposite of my assumptions. Europe and America or the West in general have proven over the last year that individualistic needs are above the global health crisis we are facing. Also, in Austria it has been a challenge for the government to persuade people that the measures we have to take are worth doing and worth keeping up.

Whilst I think the youth are more accepting of change and can form new habits more easily, I still do not think that the whole responsibility lies with them. Young people definitely faced a lot of changes regarding their education and personal life. The lack of social contact was a big struggle especially for the young generation, so naturally after restrictions were eased, teenagers and young adults flocked outside. I have recently seen a lot of group gatherings of young people at skateparks or other public places. At first, I wanted to blame them, but I realised that I myself was not stricter than them and the government allowed it, so I just went on with my day. One thing, though, I believe we can do to make sure everyone is meeting safely, is to get tested before and after meeting one person or more. As young people we have easier access to smartphones and the internet so booking an appointment for a free antigen test at one of the many test sites in Vienna is really easier than ever. Additionally young people also have the advantages of meeting online more easily than other generations.

However, the real ethical obligations lie in informing others about how to keep safe during the pandemic and helping out marginalised communities. For example, the Caritas Wien, a non-profit social organisation, established a help-hotline for people or seniors who didn't have anybody to talk to. One could simply call the number and speak with a volunteer for however long they wanted to. There is also a project for helping out neighbours inspired by an Austrian journalist called Natascha Strobl in Vienna. On this website young and able-bodied people can offer their help for daily tasks like grocery shopping, taking dogs for a walk or taking out the

rubbish. To only name those two projects I think Austrian youth have already showed how much they can do to support people in COVID-19 high-risk groups and the elderly. Unfortunately, I have not yet taken part in any of the projects, but I did start donating money to various organisations or private people who needed financial help during the pandemic. Whilst we see a lot of engagement from the young generation, there also have been instances where the individual needs were more important to young people than caring about the spread of COVID-19. From now and then there have been incidents reported about COVID-19 parties mostly thrown by influential and rich people or their children. I, myself, once received an invitation to a house party sent out by one of my fellow students to a university related group chat, I was part of.

All in all, we cannot generalise the youth for being too careless or for being too responsible, but we can acknowledge that there have been a few projects where young people were especially at the forefront of partaking. Besides following the measures against the spread of COVID-19 we, as young people, have ethical obligations as well. The pandemic has provided the opportunity for the youth to get active in community projects and provide their help and support to the ones that need it.

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Patrizia Fink
Patrizia obtained their Bachelor's degree in Korean Studies from the University of Vienna in July 2020 and they are currently pursuing a Linguistics major at the same university. Patrizia is currently aiming at pursuing a Master's degree in International Politics in Korea as a result of their strong interest in socio-political issues. Their academic focus lies heavily on North Korea and its relations to other countries.

Valerie-Sophie Schoenberg, Austria

Shifting the blame in the spread of COVID-19

The public debate on compliance with the COVID-19 measures focuses too much on the misconduct of individuals. There seems to be a general agreement on holding individuals, mostly young people who are having 'COVID-19 parties' or gather in public spaces, accountable for not being able to put an end to the pandemic. I would like to challenge this assumption: compared to large entities, such as companies and public institutions, we tend to attribute more influence on the individual actions and decision-making. Additionally, by judging situations too quickly and therefore locking ourselves into a simplistic explanation, cognitive biases lead us to overestimate certain factors and overlook the bigger picture.

Individualistic Culture

In our Western individualist cultures, we do not only emphasise the individual over the entire group but also attribute seemingly infinite power to the individual. A famous example is the cliché of 'you can obtain everything if you only work hard enough'. It seems only natural that major social problems are therefore also attributed to individuals.

For instance, in the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, in March 2020, one man in Tyrol, Austria, was blamed to have been at the origin of about 1,000 infections in Central Europe (Merlot, 2020). Many newspapers – in Austria and abroad, referred to him as 'super-spreader' – a highly contagious persons who infects a significant number of others with COVID-19.

However, even if he was the one who passed on the virus, the actual origin of this COVID-19 cluster is the bar he worked in: the only reason the bartender was unfortunate enough to spread the virus at such a high rate that his employer kept the bar open despite the growing concern over the COVID-19 outbreak. Looking at other reported incidents of 'super-spreaders', it becomes obvious that these situations are rarely tied to people's leisure time but rather directly related to their employment. Why are organisations not called super-spreaders and held accountable for the effects of their (in) actions?

An even bigger threat to the world population in the long term is climate change. Here, we can observe a comparable storyline: we blame drivers for being 'climate sinners', we feel ashamed for having to buy a plastic bag at the supermarket, because we forgot our reusable bag at home, and we shake our heads because the neighbour keeps their lights on all the time. Hence, we save on energy, buy regional products and avoid travelling by plane to feel like climate saviours. It is crucial that we take on our individual responsibility as end consumers – but it won't change much, unless the system itself changes.

As Julia Steinberger, professor of ecological economics at the University of Leeds, put it: "Just because you can allocate [emissions] to an entity or to a location in a supply chain, does not mean that the power of agency lies with that entity or that location in the supply chain" (Timperley, 2020). In our individualistic culture, we tend to see the individual as the only relevant actor and oftentimes think of large organisations as passive entities that cannot actively shape the system they operate in, the benefits they

produce, as well as what is referred to as 'negative externalities' – the costs or harmful consequences experienced by a third party when an economic transaction takes place.

During the Austrian COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, organisations were urged to enable teleworking wherever possible – except for system-relevant professions and organisations. However, having a look within my own social circle, a number of employers used every conceivable reason in order not to allow employees to work from home, thereby creating situations in which the virus was easily passed on. The arguments were manifold: ranging from a lack of IT infrastructure, to the need to ensure sufficient productivity by having their employees work on premise. Some employers even expected interviews to be conducted onsite with all invited applicants physically present.

People affected by such measures did not have any other choice than to take public transportation on their way to and from work and to share office space, oftentimes even open plan offices. As we all know, you can easily get infected with COVID-19 in closed spaces with limited air flow. This negligence on the employer's side can lead to them turning into super-spreaders – just by complying with their superiors' orders.

We are all biased

Imagine you are carrying food for your sick grandmother and the subway you take is packed with people. Whilst they know that they have to work on premise – but the only thing you see is that we are all supposed to stay home, and yet all these people are still outside. Scrolling through your social media on the subway, you see an article about people not respecting COVID-19 regulations. You hit 'like' on the article, even forward it to a friend. The next day, your feed will likely be flooded with articles, posts, and pictures with similar content. Welcome to the social media echo chamber, where all your beliefs are being confirmed.

Imagine further, a few days later, you see someone wearing their FFP2 mask incorrectly, the person's nose is not even covered. Now that you are aware that some rules are not respected, you start paying more attention to these types of misconducts and seem to see them everywhere. Why are others behaving so carelessly and endangering others?

It is possible that there is a growing part of the population that disrespects the COVID-19 rules. Most probably, however, you are affected by the Baader-Meinhof phenomenon, more commonly known as frequency illusion. It refers to a cognitive bias, according to which, people suddenly notice something everywhere, that they have only recently learned of, leading them to believe that it has a high frequency.

Finally, being biased by the frequency illusion and your personalised social media bubble, you start to feel powerless. Despite all the COVID-19 rules in place, the number of COVID-19 cases does not drop, and you become increasingly fed up with the situation. You follow the rules, stay locked in at your small apartment and cannot implement any of the plans you have made for the upcoming months. You now have a desperate need to blame someone for the situation and end up blaming those, whom you observe breaking the rules: the children playing football in the park or your neighbour who is regularly leaving the house to work as a cleaning woman; you are not the only one: the so-called 'kick-the-dog' effect (or displaced aggression) leads people to blame an individual or group of persons who are inferior within an organisation's hierarchy for things that are going wrong (Richardson, 2017).

Shifting our mindset

As we can see, within our individualistic society, intensified through cognitive biases, it is easy to find reasons to blame and shame individuals. Too often, we stop there and wish for a quick remedy rather than look for so-called root causes that lie at the core of the problem. In this case, addressing the actual reasons for why we

are not able to put an end to the pandemic or building an understanding of human activities that have the biggest impact on the climate crisis.

This is not to say that individuals have no power of agency nor that we should not hold everyone responsible for breaking rules and endangering others. It does mean, however, that we should evaluate their actions relative to their influence within the overall system. It also means that we have to hold large organisations accountable for so-called 'negative externalities' they are responsible for within the system they operate in.

To build a real understanding and identify the levers that have the largest effect, we must look beyond what can be easily observed e.g., people on the street not respecting the distancing rules. Instead, we must learn to analyse what is invisible to most of us, by aiming at fully understanding the context of the problem and determining the root-causes that need to be addressed. Only by embracing complexity, challenging our assumptions, and welcoming disagreements within society, we can find actual solutions for the multiple crises we are in.

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Lamia Mohsin, Bangladesh

Resilience in society: the role of the youth

The government of Bangladesh has evidently redeemed its image with the successful sourcing and efficient rollout of vaccines in the country. However, in the frenzy of this success it yet remains imperative to step back and assess the efficacy of the healthcare system across the board. Right after its emergence, the COVID-19 pandemic quite viciously revealed major fault-lines in health care systems operating in many countries, with Bangladesh being no exception. It unravelled an undermined truth – that burgeoning economies and soaring GDPs are simply not enough to carry the burden of a dysfunctional healthcare system and crunching superficial numbers in the form of per capita income are of no use if healthcare systems remain incapacitated, as manifested by the acute paucity of medical facilities and amenities for people battling death.

Looking back at the performance of the healthcare system, it was witnessed that the absence of monitoring, infrastructural lapses and shortage of essential medical facilities and specialised medical equipment were just the tip of the iceberg. The incumbent crisis was further exacerbated by the different forms of crimes and irregularities in the healthcare sector, especially in the form of white-collar crimes. However, be it developed or developing countries, public healthcare systems failed to deliver the due service, as issues like structural inadequacy, mismanagement, corruption and fraudulence were endemic. In the US for example, the Department of Justice, in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services found widespread instances of market manipulation, price gouging and distribution of hoarded personal protective equipment.

Quite similarly in Bangladesh, mismanagement coupled with overriding corruption in medical supply transactions, testing and reporting were evidently rampant.

According to a report by the OECD (2020), the pandemic has hit vulnerable groups disproportionally and is likely to exacerbate existing inequalities and economic, as well as health, impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which have been asymmetric across age groups. Globally, current evidence suggests that young people are less at-risk in terms of developing severe physical health symptoms linked to COVID-19 than older age cohorts (WHO, 2020). However, the disruption in their access to education and employment opportunities, as a result of economic downturn, is likely to put the young generation on a much more volatile trajectory in finding and maintaining quality jobs and stable income.

Whilst the trajectory of the pandemic varies across countries, most governments in OECD countries have implemented social distancing, lockdowns, and social isolation measures to contain the spread of the virus. In this context, youth organisations have expressed great concern about the impact of COVID-19 on mental well-being, employment, income loss, disruptions to education, familial relations and friendships, as well as a limitation to individual freedoms. Since the outset of the pandemic, over 70% of youth who study or combine study with work in Bangladesh have been adversely affected by the closing of schools, universities and training centres, according to a 2020 analysis by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). According to the report, 65%

of young people reported having learnt less since the beginning of the pandemic because of the transition from classroom to online and distance learning during lockdown. Despite their efforts to continue studying and training, half of them believed their studies would be delayed and nine per cent thought that they might fail. However, the loss in schooling hours is not the only impact looming out from the COVID-19 crisis. On top of learning, schools are also a vital source of social protection, nutrition, health, as well as psychosocial supports to children and young adults. Therefore, on top of loss in learning, school closures have far-reaching impacts on social and economic issues such as school dropouts, digital divide, food insecurity and malnutrition, childcare, as well as disability services.

Despite the extreme circumstances and adverse impacts on education and household income, as well as limited mobility enforced by social distancing measures, young people in Bangladesh have actively participated in community mobilisation and advocacy by arranging courtyard discussions and school-based campaigns to raise awareness about COVID-19. During these sessions, they demonstrated what should be done to avoid becoming infected. They also explained how to wear a facemask and how to wash hands appropriately, as well as how to maintain social distancing, following the guidelines of WHO and the Ministry of Health, Bangladesh. Volunteer groups marked circles or squares on the ground in marketplaces and in front of pharmacies and grocery shops to maintain and ensure social distancing. Young people also initiated a sterilisation process in crowded areas like marketplaces, mosques and roads, requested people to remain at home and distributed protective equipment to local health service providers.

The COVID-19 crisis will undoubtedly trigger a rise in unemployment among the youth. It is also assumed that skills demanded in the labour markets will also undergo significant transformations. The government should, therefore, address the immediate, short-term and medium-term impact to guide responses for a long-term sustainable approach.

To build back better for all generations, governments should consider updating national youth strategies in collaboration with youth stakeholders to translate political commitment into actionable programme. Leveraging young people's current mobilisation in mitigating the crisis through existing mechanisms, tools and platforms (e.g., the use of digital tools and data) to build resilience in societies against future shocks and disasters is also a key reform that needs to be initiated.

We live in an era where it is difficult to determine whether the increasing interconnectedness of the world can be considered as a bane or boon. Whilst COVID-19 is undoubtedly at its heart a health crisis, in the broad scheme of things, it is a tripartite issue – with dimensions including health, economic, and social. Yet, amidst these trying times, youth of Bangladesh, and all around the world have displayed incredible resilience and conscientiousness, thus reinforcing our conviction in the motto – 'That's where the future lies, in the youth of today'.

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Lamia Mohsin

Lamia is currently working as a Junior Consultant at the Resilience and Inclusive Growth Cluster, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), where she provides for the needs of the marginalised population in the climate vulnerable coastal areas of Bangladesh. Additionally, Lamia is the co-founder of Standing up For the Underprivileged, a youth-driven voluntary organisation that works on areas such as social inclusion, reduced inequalities and access to education for underprivileged children. Besides that, she has won a number of research grants, including the Young Researcher grant funded by UNDP, SDC and DANIDA.

Laurence van den Abbeele, Belgium

Freedom versus health: a battle of values

It has been a full year of living with COVID-19 at this point. Most of us still can't completely wrap our heads around it. A full year of isolation, wearing masks, not seeing loved ones, working remotely, using soap and disinfectant like never before. New reflexes, new rules, new words used in daily phrases. 'Social distancing', 'self-isolating', 'zoom fatigue'...there was before and there is now. Two different worlds. In Europe we used to value freedom above all else. Freedom of movement, of thought, of speech. In this new world 'Health' has supplanted Freedom. Is it a step back, or a re-alignment of priorities and values?

Most of us obey the new rules, albeit reluctantly. Having been raised in organised societies, we recognise the value of laws to structure our lives. Rules, by removing uncertainty as much as possible, have allowed safe structured societies to develop, and mankind, inherently a violent race, to thrive. Nowadays we can leave our house without having to worry that someone else will have occupied it when we return. We can eat a meal slowly, in peace, not having to rush in fear that someone might attack us to steal our food. We are obeying rules because, deep down, we know that, whilst not always perfect, we need them.

Creative and critical minds are a by-product of our peaceful, structured societies. The world would not have had so many wonderful musicians, artists, philosophers, had Beethoven and Descartes had to fight for food every day, at the peril of their life. The relative security offered by the growth of structured societies, led, throughout centuries, to new reasons to battle (the human fighting instinct is hard to quench). Once our minds and thinking had fully developed

thanks to the guarantee of food and shelter, we started wanting more. There were wars for power, wars for wealth and, wars for Freedom, one of the strongest motivators for fighting in our developed world. "Freedom" is a value that many educated and intrinsically pacifistic people have willingly taken up arms for throughout the history of our developed societies.

Freedom, today, in the middle of a global pandemic, is still the main reason for rebellion. In the pre-pandemic world, we were used to vast amounts of it, and, suddenly, a virus robbed us of things we considered basic rights. In Belgium, we currently live with curfews and limited numbers of social contacts. Some countries have locked down millions of people with even stricter measures. Fines are heavy for those who disobey. Faced with these new rules, some people react. They want their full Freedom back and are shouting it in the streets and on social media. They want to enjoy life and be the sole deciders of the risks they take.

This is where Freedom and global Health come in conflict. It is a battle of values: to some Freedom trumps it all. They want the liberty to choose, or not, to take risks. Others, on the contrary, see it as duty to renounce some joys for more guarantees of Health, for themselves, their loved ones and everyone else around them. Some people who are fighting against the current measures, however, have pressing reasons to: they might have lost a job, or seen their business suddenly closed by law. Their rebellion against the new rules is a fight for their livelihood: putting food on the table and a roof above their heads. Despite the appearances, these rebels do not fight for Freedom, they choose Health as well.

Governments, overall, remain impervious to those who react against the rules. I believe it is a good sign. Freedom is a value our ancestors died for, but Freedom has its limits, and it stops where that of others begins. Freedom should be restricted by Respect.

That may very well be the realignment of values our consumerist and growingly egocentric society strongly needs. To continue to thrive in the future, our societies need to start valuing Respect more. Respect for all humans, regardless of ability, gender, age or race, respect for nature and our planet, respect for ourselves and our physical and mental health.

If the post-COVID-19 world could realign Freedom with Respect, then humanity will have learnt an essential lesson, and, as a species, we might still have a chance to prosper, row and develop even further.

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Laurence holds a Master's degree in Business Engineering from the Université Catholique de Louvain and a CEMS Master's Degree in International Management (MIM). After her studies she worked for the Executive Agency for Small and Medium Enterprises (EASME) at the European Commission, which ignited her passion for entrepreneurship in Europe. She co-founded several start-ups and specialised in Real Estate and Fiscality through Executive Programmes at the Solvay Business School, Brussels. She currently manages several real estate projects, in Belgium and Luxembourg, where she raises her family. Laurence is an ASEFEdu alumnus.

Maxim Vandekerckhove, Belgium

Why timing matters

A commonly heard argument during this pandemic has been that this period of crisis is negligible compared to the scale of a lifetime. But the clock doesn't tick as fast for every generation. The youth have had to make enormous sacrifices which other generations who have already finished their education, have built a network, have been able to explore all opportunities to know where their talents and passion lay, and have a solid job. Nevertheless, the young generation took its responsibility during this crisis and acted as responsible citizens, but this gigantic effort is not valued accordingly.

The first aspect of this ever-growing inequality, not only between generations, but also within the demographical youth group is the discrepancy in the chances of getting a degree. Ironically, numbers show that, at least in Belgian universities, the pandemic had a positive effect on the results of students, since now they have less opportunities to be busy with extra-curricular activities and leisure (Universiteit Gent, 2021). But this positive sound needs to be put in perspective. Students who already had the chance to fully develop themselves during earlier forms of education, and who were professionally helped to solve some of their potential learning difficulties or personal problems, were able to fully focus on their studies now that there wasn't much else to do. But a whole portion of our youth were deprived of these equalising opportunities. Speech therapy sessions were cancelled at schools, personal guidance and motivation from the teacher or fellow students were taken away and these aspects were only aggravated by the fact that some students had to study in a place or a family situation which doesn't allow the

same chances of succeeding. For young people the pandemic has impacted both their studies, as well as their participation in society. Due to school closures, students have been unable to come together in physical spaces, massively affecting their communication amongst themselves, as well as with teachers and communities. But the new modes of interaction, principally online, have also spurred innovation and empowered some students to find their voices. At the same time, in the pandemic's social and education disruption, disadvantaged people are experiencing disproportionate harm, amid widening inequality based on the digital divide. Of children and youth aged 8 to 19 studying before the pandemic, 73% experienced school closures, with 13% were left without any access to courses, teachers or learning at all because of gaps in online and distance learning, according to UNESCO and the Council of Europe (UNESCO, 2021).

The second aspect to point out is the impact on the job market. A decade ago, the global financial crisis left deep scars in terms of destroyed opportunities and unemployment for young people. In Europe in particular, youth unemployment persisted. Now the COVID-19 crisis threatens to do the same thing to the under-25s (Wolff, 2020). Years of job growth has eroded in a matter of months, leaving more than twice as many young people than other adults out of work. The unemployment rate for people 25 and under jumped from 14.7% in January to 17.65% in August, its highest level since 2017. Based on simple model calculations, we estimate the consequences of the COVID-19 shutdown on youth unemployment in the European Union for the year 2020. According

to our estimations, youth unemployment will increase from 2.8 to 4.8 million. The youth unemployment rate will increase to 26%, and the number of young people not in education, employment and training (NEET) will increase from 4.7 to 6.7 million (Bacher & Tamesberger, 2020).

Europeans coming of age in the pandemic are lowering their expectations of the jobs and careers they can get. Many are resorting to internships, living with parents or returning to school to ride out the storm. Young workers without higher education risk sliding even further. But that's not the only problem. Young graduates must now compete with a rapidly expanding pool of unemployed candidates with work experience they don't yet have. Many are angling to secure any kind of job, including entry-level positions that are traditionally the steppingstone to careers for new graduates (Alderman & Abdul, 2020).

A third and last major offer the youth had to bring during this pandemic concerns extra-curricular activities that will develop their soft skills. Restrictions on physical meetings and travelling have directly impacted the international youth work training field. European level youth work mobility activities have been cancelled or postponed. This has not left a lot of alternatives for youth work training until face-to-face meetings will be possible again (You Move Europe, 2020). The value of these mobility projects for the development of youth into culturally and economically broadly thinking citizens have never been valued enough in the regular education system in Europe , but now that formal education is the only form of education "legally allowed", the loss of soft skills combined with the missed opportunities for youth to build a network beyond their national borders, is devastating and will definitely have an impact on future cross border collaborations and the necessity of a new generation of leaders who will be able to make agreements with each other in a deeply understanding way of cultural differences.

All these aspects: the steeply dropped numbers in the youth's mental health, the lack of cultural and educational interaction and the missed opportunities, were all aggravated by closing the EU's internal border. I hope this will be condemned heavily by the future generations and will never be repeated. This de facto ended all EU solidarity and let us go back to archaic borders, something we as future leaders need to fight at all costs.

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Nadia binti Hj Aji, Brunei Darussalam

The loss of financial and emotional safety

On 29 January 2021, I attended a dialogue session called the 'PERSPEKTIV X Impact Dialogue' hosted by Chevening Alumni Brunei, Young Professionals Network Brunei and Brunei Youth Council. The dialogue event was also supported by the British High Commissioner to Brunei, His Excellency John Virgoe. The dialogue was conducted to decipher the realities of an uncertain future unleashed by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to shape and reinforce the society's understanding of the new paradigm and discuss opportunities that can create an open mic sharing with its participants. The theme of the dialogue was 'Reimagining The Future in The New Paradigm' and the attendees of the dialogue were seated into three other groups to discuss a specific topic such as education, business and social.

I chose to sit at the 'business' table as I was interested in discussing the economy in the midst of the pandemic. That whole evening, I listened to these people on my table discussing how the pandemic affected their families, businesses, careers and finances. Personally, the pandemic has affected my family members financially. My brother works as a technician in one of the telecommunication companies here and was on the verge of losing his job as the company is trying to save costs by laying off employees. On the other hand, my father works as a car salesman and during the pandemic, digital marketing has been a go-to strategy to increase sales. However, my father is a boomer who is also not particularly tech-savvy which has caused him to lose a lot of sales during the pandemic. As my mother has retired and my father is the main source of income in my family,

this pandemic has greatly affected our family financially.

Apart from that, my twin sister is a medical student who is studying abroad in Scotland, United Kingdom. Not only is she living worrisomely far away from all of us, her field of study also requires her to work in the frontline at the hospital in a country with the highest number of COVID-19 cases. As of 10 March 2021, the COVID-19 cases in Scotland were 206,000 and total deaths were 7,441 (John Hopkins University CSSE COVID-19 Data, 2021). In order to address the well-being and security of the students studying abroad, the Brunei government had highly encouraged them to return (Government of Brunei Darussalam, 2020). Even though the measures taken in Brunei Darussalam have been applauded by other country's governments for its success in de-escalating the curve of COVID-19 cases, however the measures framework does not emphasise on the protection of the mental health of frontliners, Bruneians who are studying and working abroad and the nation as a whole.

I have come to realise that all these issues that my family and other people are facing during the pandemic have been contributing to the rise of mental health issues, such as excessive stress and depression amongst the locals. Back in March 2018, it was reported that there were 47 Bruneian scholarship students who are studying abroad diagnosed with mental health problems due to challenges such as academic, family, time management and environment between 2014 and 2018 (Abu Bakar, 2018). Even though this statistic only represents 0.5% of the total local

students studying abroad, this issue should not be taken lightly (Abu Bakar, 2018). There could be more Bruneians who suffer from mental health problems and are not willing to ask for help.

In this pandemic, it is only expected that these numbers will increase. They are battling alone in other foreign countries where COVID-19 cases are much higher as compared to in Asia, particularly Brunei. They are away from their family and friends. They are expected to stay home and isolate themselves from the world in a foreign country. This can take a toll on someone who is also expected to deliver the best academically and professionally. Most Bruneians with mental health problems abroad are referred to seek help from the mental health professionals in that country. However, there is always a challenge of language and cultural barriers between the Bruneian patients and the medical professionals, which can make the therapy session less effective.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) survey (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a disruption or a halt on critical mental health services in 93% of countries worldwide. When in fact the demand for these services is increasing. This raises urgency for increased funding in mental health services. In December 2020, I attended a local Youth Town Hall where I proposed to the ministers to have a digitalised therapy session between local mental health professionals with the Bruneians living abroad during the pandemic. This can simply be done on video call applications such as Zoom or WhatsApp video call. Backhaus et. al. (2012) stated that videoconferencing psychotherapy (VCP) has been found to create a strong therapeutic relationship between patient and therapists. Furthermore, Stubbings et. al. (2013) also mentioned that the benefits of VCP are similar to that of face-to-face therapy.

Therefore, I believe the Brunei government should put an emphasis on seeking mental health care when needed, not only for the locals who are abroad, but also the pandemic frontliners and the public who might suffer from mental health problems in the midst of COVID-19.

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Roberta Guevska, Bulgaria

Community spirit: building our youth for the future

"We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future."
Franklin D. Roosevelt

As the old saying of this former American politician who served as the 32nd President of the United States goes – it is not always the responsibility of the adults to bring a better future for the younger generations. More often it is important for them to build a strong community spirit within the youth, to lay the foundations of a character with a sense of responsibility and obligation to the world community, to our planet and to the next generations, as well. As a young person myself I strongly believe in these words and in the collective responsibility approach which is of utmost importance throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The way I see it, youth are the solution and not the problem, thus we have a key role in overcoming the current situation – by building up a strong sense of belonging to a common fate, ethical obligations and a sense of responsibility for everyone's health and well-being during the pandemic. As far as I am concerned, young people around me, and in my country in general, strive to be better at following the restrictions and temporally limiting their individual rights in order to slow down the spread of the virus and to sooner than later get over the health crisis of today. Therefore, in my mind, most young people prefer who take a look at the current situation and take the steps needed to keep the society safe and healthy.

As an example, on how the youth and its community spirit could be motivated to obey the various restrictions due to COVID-19, I would like to briefly describe the current situation in a more cultural aspect. There is a widespread opinion that young people are often irresponsible, insensitive, and even selfish – not only about the present, but about the future, as well. In 2018 we all saw that this was a quite misleading interpretation of the youth, when the then 16-year-old Swedish girl – Greta Thunberg refused to attend classes on Fridays in order to strike against the lack of actions from governments to tackle climate change. In the following years the "Fridays For Future" movement evolved to become one of the most successful youth actions since the protests of May 1968. Later in 2020 as the world stepped into the unknown life of social isolation and quarantine, it seemed like the youth are protected from the virus but could easily spread it. It seems to me that this was the exact moment, a kind of tipping point for the young people – not only the ones I am acquainted with, but all around the globe. It was a moment of determination and self-reflection – because the future is what we make out of it and overcoming the pandemic could be a lot easier if we participate and put efforts to that direction instead of staying silent or even worse – breaking the law and therefore deepening the health crisis we find ourselves in.

One particularly good example of my opinion stated above is being examined in a research paper by Ph.D. Margarita Bokracheva – a professor at Sofia University in Bulgaria. According to her studies, in the beginning, the focus of young people on the social networks was the COVID-19 virus, and later whilst the disease and the state of emergency remained the leading subject of discussion, they are increasingly balanced out by other topics.

Polar opinions and attacks are mainly due to compliance and non-compliance with measures against the spread of the virus. What is more, the interviewed young people mainly share the fear of death, of losing a loved one, of personal health, of financial problems and of the unknown. They are also frightened by the lack of control over the situation, the feeling of insecurity and hopelessness, and they feel a lot of anger. Young people also believe that mental health challenges can be no less a scourge than the disease itself. The main factors that young people think can help in this situation are the media to present good news and to limit negative information.

As this research shows the constant discussion of COVID-19 related topics, although considered exaggerated by many, has led young people to think more maturely and with a responsibility of their own actions. In my opinion, most young people in Bulgaria do feel socially obligated to follow the rules in the pandemic, many of us have developed some sort of feeling for community in these hard times. As I see it the youth of today are far more educated and mature than they were in 2019. Although being young, many of us have come to understood that right now more than ever our voice and our actions are important. And as global citizens we owe not only to the present but to the future generations, as well, to move forward and build a safe and healthy environment that everyone could benefit from.

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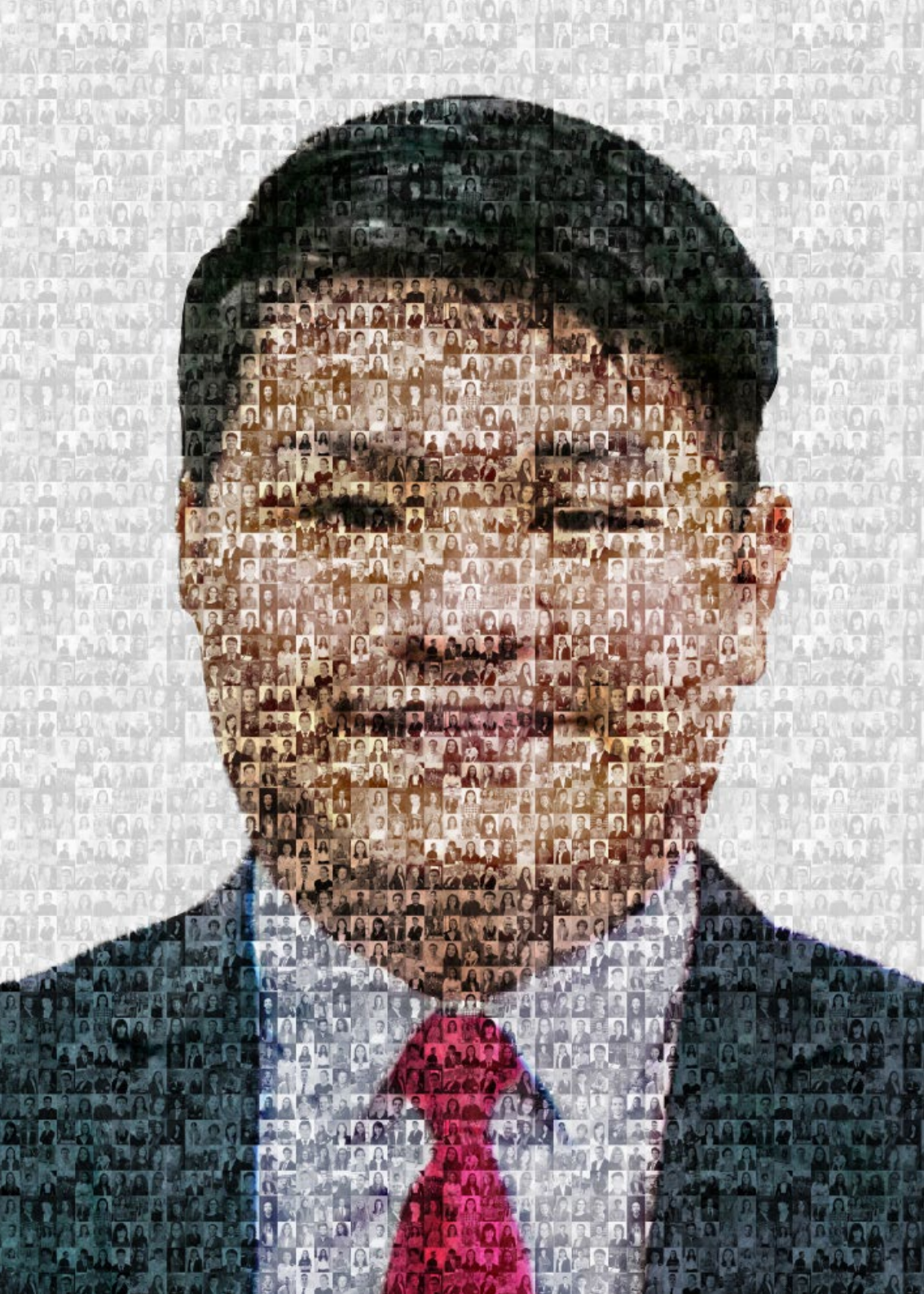
Different boats but the same storm

"We are not all in the same boat. We are all in the same storm. Some are on super-yachts. Some have just the one oar" – Damian Barr

Since the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world has faced the tragedy of health insecurity, economic destruction, and social distress. Soon after, the phrase 'we are all in the same boat' has been repeated and become a cliche everywhere on social media and in public.

But are we really in the same boat, same pace, and same conditions in response to this pandemic? Or are we in different boats but the same storm?

Presently, COVID-19 has been marked as the most tremendous crisis in the world in the 21st century. According to the World Health Organisation, over one-hundred million cases have been confirmed including more than 2.5 million deaths globally, at the time of writing. In addition, there has been a strong economic downturn, which has become the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930s (IMF, 2020). COVID-19 is a non-human race and a no border disease, and it could infect every person if they are careless about self-protection.

Based on my perception, COVID-19 would likely refer to the storm where its forces could affect every boat – referring to the states and people. Frankly, the presence of COVID-19 has brought significant negative outcomes, but we are not in the same boat as we think because we do have different techniques and pace of control and treatment. We are in different boats because other boats are so-called ships or superyachts which could stay safe and balanced under the

storm for a longer time, whilst other boats are much more vulnerable to the storm.

On the other hand, COVID-19 has brought significant changes to each individual in the world. We can say that individuals on earth are confronting the same strong storm; the COVID-19 pandemic, that has the power to transform people's living standards. All people in virus-infected areas have limited their travelling, stayed at home, kept social distance, etc. Although the storm has brought the same issues to all people, the level of difficulties of living for each individual is not the same. Some people are still in better condition than others. For instance, the rich people or the ones who have enough resources, can stock up on goods. In contrast, poor people who are under the poverty line, are facing the hardship of economic recession and the high possibility of hunger and food insecurity.

"For some, quarantine is optimal: a moment of reflection, of reconnection. For others, this is a desperate crisis. For others, it is facing loneliness. For some, peace, rest time, vacation.

Yet for others, Torture: How am I going to pay my bills? Some were concerned about a brand of chocolate for Easter. Others were concerned about the bread for the weekend, or if the noodles would last for a few more days" – Damian Barr

Since we are in the same storm of COVID-19, what we can do is to help each other. Just because we are on different boats, does not mean we have different responsibilities. We should bear in mind that all boats have the

same purpose which is seeking survival. The COVID-19 is like a storm, and we must note that in reality, it is an apparent virus that everyone can get infected with. Simply means that the job of one state cannot be done when COVID-19 still appears in other states. As a result, the collective responsibility approach during this time is much more important than the individual approach. We need to come together in the spirit of empathy, responsibility, and co-operation at both bilateral and multilateral levels to combat this global issue.

COVID-19 is becoming a long-standing problem and we are unable to resolve on our own. But, through co-operation and unity among states and individuals, we can get through this vicious pandemic. Only our joint efforts can create the power to combat the pandemic, allowing the world and all of humanity to be free of this virus. It is a moment where the powerful and wealthy assist the frail and vulnerable.

We are in different boats and the same storm now. But we all owe each other the loyalty that we have agreed to give the rights of survival everyone deserves.

Let's get it done together!

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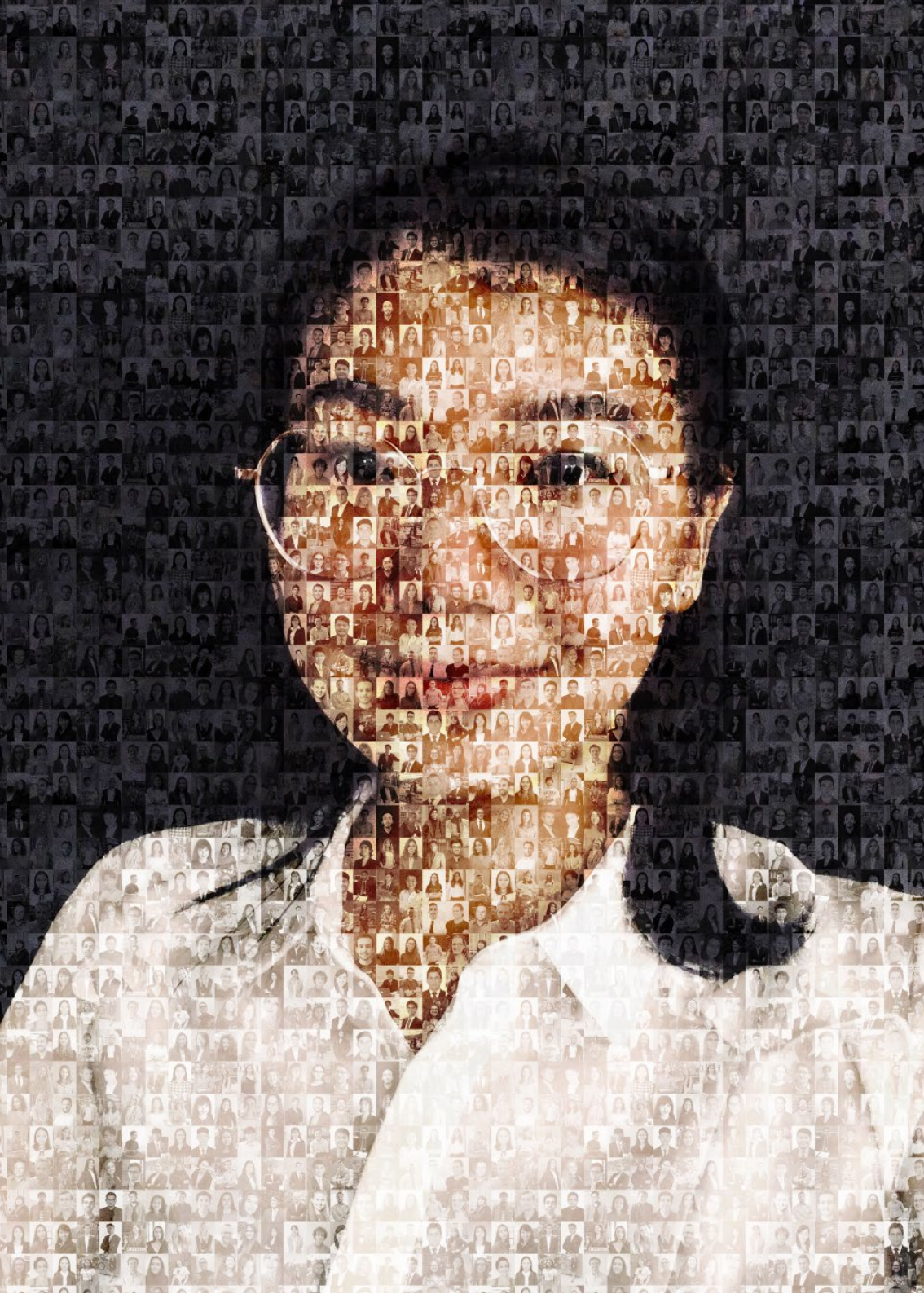
Rithmonich Heng, Cambodia

Difference is no excuse for ignorance

COVID-19 has taught me a lot about the world. Access to the internet and technology has put everything on the same table to see that we do not live in the same way. We do not share the same privileges to survive during the pandemic, especially when we believe in different things. However, even when that is the case, talking from a global citizen's perspective, I believe we owe each other respect. Though we are different, I do not think 'difference' should be an excuse to be ignorant.

Recalling back to the beginning of the outbreak, some people called the virus by the location of the first case, the Chinese virus or the Wuhan virus. It is true and sounds simple. But I am afraid this inconsiderate indication is the cause of racism and the recent Asian hate. It is true that language matters, either verbal or physical language. In a digital world, what we say and how we behave can lead to racism. The WHO saw what would be coming, which is why they have had strict guidelines toward the disease's name. Like any other pandemic in the past, the WHO named our recent virus as COVID-19 for scientific purposes.

Until this point, what could have been better? Maybe a bit of respect and consideration so we could have a better place to live? Perhaps we should have only had to deal with the outbreak instead of both the outbreak and racism?

Some people have considered COVID-19 as a fact, but some have found it debatable. What are the consequences of this? Those who found COVID-19 as a fact could keep COVID-19 under control. Those countries had faster responses, extensive and affordable testing kits, well-spread information to citizens. The governments suggested citizens wear masks, break the circuit, stay in quarantine if sick. All of this social responsibility has become a new normal.

In places where COVID-19 was questionable, many innocent lives have been lost to COVID-19. What if everyone did take COVID-19 seriously? Perhaps those innocent lives could have lived to celebrate the world free of COVID-19 in the near future?

We need to work harder to contain diseases because, like WHO mentioned, nobody is safe until everyone is safe. But has everyone been on the same page? People from a privileged background enjoyed escaping to a luxury isolated place. Some enjoyed staying indoors and planning trips when everything is over, and some people even paid money to escape quarantines. People from underprivileged background were struggling to pay rent and mourning for job losses. What if everybody was on the same page to acknowledge that we all play an equal role to contain the disease?

Writing all of this, I reflected that the world, maybe, is moving too fast, and everybody is busy keeping up with the spin until we forget what is happening around us. If that is the case, it is time to pause to look left and right, back and front, see who needs help, and see what we should do to keep everyone around us safe. Since respect is costless, how about giving 'respect' away as much as we can? Since we are one society, respect and empathy are the keys to a better place, and I do not think we have any space left for ignorance.

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To owe each other the best version of ourselves

The concept of Global Citizenship has been emerging since 2005, and it has reached the extent where one in five people around the globe call themselves a global citizen. By its definition, it is to become a citizen beyond one's home country, be aware of global interests and outcomes. The unprecedented arrival of COVID-19 has stirred up a lot of movements, campaigns, discussions on a global level in search of the best practices. Youth have become active agents in leading the innovative responses and become part of the solutions to mitigate the consequences in their communities.

In my opinion, on a global level, we owe each other the best version of ourselves in whatever we do. Being a role model for each other regardless of race, nationality, culture, and expertise. It is true that this pandemic appeared to be a non-serious case to some people who were reportedly not wearing masks and were taking the safety guidelines for granted. This issue may come down to the differences in norms, political situations, and beliefs as explained in a commentary on Channel News Asia in 2020 (Koh, 2020). However, even if it's an individual's approach to personal well-being, it casts confusion, frustration, and disappointment on not just the frontlines in their country but others around the globe. Following that report, there seemed to be a lot of constructive opinions responding to the validation of those careless practices giving the current virus spread in their areas. Despite this issue, a lot of young people have stepped up and done their part in mitigating the risks, aiming for a virus-free future. Therefore, their actions and commitment have contributed to a bigger impact, looking at what has been done in Cambodia. Even

being known as one of the countries to quickly put the virus-spread to a halt, we have learnt from and practiced what has been done in our neighbouring countries. I would like to highlight a few real cases of how our youth's sense of responsibility could help contain the spread of the virus.

Following the first arrival of COVID-19 in Cambodia, the Ministry of Education led a competition entitled 'Khmer Education COVID-19 App' to encourage all the tech enthusiasts to come up with a tool to educate the locals on the pandemic. No matter how serious COVID-19 became in the world, our Cambodian citizens were not familiar with the international news and very dependent on the acts of the Ministry of Health. With this initiative, a lot of young people showed interest and joined hands with the Ministry in making the tools possible and accessible for the public; helping them to stay updated with accurate and credible information. To date, 5 platforms have been created and are served to the public nationwide.

Individuals respond on a ground level: not just well-trained personnel but those who have the same interests, a group of young people introduced the self-quarantine app to track the virus and people's well-being. Not only did they make their prototype very simple, but they have also earned admiration from the Ministry as reported on national news, and it has helped many people recover their well-being, and that would be translated as a collective benefit. Being proactive, helping themselves and their communities: the new normal has showcased the need for technical transformation and new approaches to individuals' well-being. The young

people I've seen have been brave and kept up to date in seeking for self-development to fight for their business' sustainability, and especially to maintain jobs for their staff. A lot of them turned to different institutions and tried everything to adopt new digital skills or technical skills, restructure their business models, and most importantly form a support system with others to keep each other motivated during a hard time. They are more resilient and stronger than ever and play their role in the social economy.

Along with other active mobilisations in creating extensive COVID-19 response activities, young people and youth organisations have taken part in making their society more resilient inside-out, from mental to physical well-being. A lot of them have adopted digital platforms to reach out to their peers, communities, encouraging more conversations, accessing proper help, and most importantly, providing a safe space for those who need it.

Young people have the power to make things either worst or better. Their involvement can make anything possible, and every example I highlighted did not require push or force, they were all on a voluntary basis. 'We owe each other the best versions of ourselves', because, with the pandemic co-existing on earth, there is still room for us young people to do whatever we can, to do our best, and teach each other best practices in keeping our friends, family, community, and country safe. We should be fearless but not thoughtless, and our number 1 obligation during this time is to keep ourselves, our family, and our circles safe with a practical response as simple as following the safety guidelines and restrictions.

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Jo Sam, Cambodia

The influence of cultural habits on COVID-19 responses

On 19 December 2019, when the first case of COVID-19 occurred in Wuhan, China. The chaos started in the country then spread to its surrounding countries mostly in Asia until the first European case was confirmed in France after two months from the start of the outbreak which has affected the whole world. WHO was the first to provide information and guidelines over the virus to prevent transmission by washing hands, wearing masks and keeping distance from each other.

If we take a look over the periods during those 2 months between the first case in China and in France, there were big gaps in taking action through different sides. Whilst the culture of wearing masks is practiced all over the world now following the outbreak of the pandemic, surgery masks have been worn by the public as a normal health protection long before, and it is practiced mostly in countries in Asia especially in Japan, Korea, China and other countries in the southeast. Mask wearing is used in public places, schools, working offices and even in the streets, if a person has a cold or fever or due to the dirty air. An article from DW news praised the culture of wearing masks from Japan that helped in saving many lives. Meanwhile in European Countries, wearing a mask might seem weird in public. Long before the pandemic started. I remember the first time I arrived in Hungary in 2017 with a mask covering my nose because I developed a cold from the flight. People on the train next to me looked at me strangely as if I had a serious disease and even changed their seats and moved their children away from me. I counted that as a difference in culture. However, since the start of the pandemic I finally feel it is normal to wear masks among others in public.

When the first case of COVID-19 occurred in China, countries such as Korea, Japan, Southeast Asia took immediate actions by ordering face masks and practicing washing hands with the culture of sharing, masks and head sanitiser were given publicly by policemen and volunteers in the local community. And people in these regions took it seriously, meanwhile it took longer for western countries to adapt to these practices. Many reasons may have contributed to the quick adaptation of these measures in Asian communities. One of the main reasons that many people assumed was because those countries have gone through this experience before. In 2003, less than 20 years ago when SARS occurred between 2002-2003 and MERS in 2012, these outbreaks left hundreds of deaths in China, Hong Kong, Korea, Viet Nam and Canada, leaving an instant reminder of the risks decades later in these regions.

Taking a look at western histories of pandemics, they also had a huge loss from the Spanish flu or the 1918 influenza pandemic which resulted in around 50 million deaths worldwide. However, as it has been over a century since this occurred, it's perhaps a bit too far to be a good reminder for people to be alert again and some weren't even aware such a huge pandemic occurred. These are just a few thoughts I think of when it comes to the different views of different regions through the pandemic but what else it could be?

As a Cambodian who is living and studying in a western country, the cultural difference has been a big surprise for me in my everyday life. It is beautiful to see different ways people greet and exchange love with each other through body gestures and physical actions. These

include the way people shake hands and hug as a greeting or the French kiss for example. Whilst in most Asian countries people greet one another with different gestures including the hand respect, bowing to each other and head knock as a respect to people. These differences have perhaps had an impact on contributing to or limiting the spread of COVID-19. It is pretty interesting to me to see how small actions in different cultures have influenced a global problem.

In my opinion, these do not determine who is the best in leading the solutions through the pandemic but suggest things to learn from one another. We see that developed countries with advanced health care systems and technologies are now playing the big leading roles in the world in producing vaccinations to protect people from the COVID-19 pandemic. And from today and so on, I believe that everyone and every leader will learn from this virus: from its worst parts that have cost millions of lives, and the positive parts that because of this virus, the world has had to learn to work together.

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Kaliane Tea, Cambodia

The art of living together

We are all global citizens. The question is, do we act like one? What does it take for each one of us to truly be one? To me, it is consciousness. Leadership will enable you to take actions, really make things happen and by consequence, make impact. However, even if this sounds spectacular, there are always ways to act at your own pace and scale. If you are conscious about your consequences on your environment it would be a great starting point. As global citizens, we are also 'social animals', living in structured societies where public, private sectors and organisations should learn to create shared value for common goals and collective growth. No matter in which part of the world you belong, as global citizens, that is the mindset we owe each other. In this opinion piece, I will start by describing my individual experience with the COVID-19 pandemic and share my observations on the young generation around me in response to the current situation.

We tend to forget that we live on the same planet, all together. My personal mind map to being a global citizen starts with consciousness. The world you must start changing is your own one. Therefore, I would begin by saying that **we first owe ourselves respect and justice**. Loving yourself is not selfish but it is self-caring. If we all respect our own mind, body and environment; we would make better decisions and will have better impact within our own circle. The pandemic might be physical, through sickness, pain, death but it is also mental through fear, trust, and many other emotions. I strongly believe that overcoming this pandemic as global citizens is about switching our mentalities. Accepting change and embracing the emerging opportunities. I am aware that many have been

pushed into poverty, that is why **we owe each other faith, support, solidarity, and empathy**. I have travelled during two outbreaks, to New York, Paris, then Asia, twice. I could witness the change in our way of living 'together', great improvements in terms of sanitation, discipline, and resilience by acceptance. Although I would have to admit that depending on the culture, the rules were more or less accepted. Instead of keeping perspective on the situation, people would say that the government wants to control their lives by forbidding them from living. In a situation of crisis, our way of thinking can get messed up and that is where it could become dangerous. Trust is the pillar of all types of relationships, and we cannot lose sight of this, or it could become the apocalypse, socially and economically. In Cambodia, some people cannot stay home, or they will starve with their families. My colleagues told me that they could not afford working from home all day long because it would double their electricity bill. From my personal experience, we can only survive and grow together with consciousness, respect, care, and responsibility. This is what we truly owe each other as global citizens. Again, in Cambodia, the lack of consciousness, respect, and accountability from a specific population has led us to the biggest outbreak we have ever faced since March 2020. By solidarity, all Cambodian people with risk decided to self-quarantine at home. However, this is not enough anymore, and the number of new cases has not stopped growing for two weeks.

COVID-19 has taken over 2 million lives globally, with millions forced into poverty. The older generations and people with vulnerable immune systems were the most impacted by

this pandemic, youth are hence left to face this new normal by finding a way to overcome each consequence of the decisions made in the past by the elders.

Our priority now is to keep society healthy and safe, by not travelling, keeping social distance, connecting on zoom, or texting through messenger. Youth are globe trotters – always keen to discover new places, countries, we do not know what the limit is anymore. In this sense youth are global citizens, living, working, from one place to another within a few days, months, years. However, this lifestyle is contributing to the COVID-19 spread more than it is preventing it. Today, many families are separated, couples in long distance relationships, but this is a global concern, so as global citizens we need to face and overcome this pandemic together. It is the biggest challenge for youth around me, education curriculums, internships, job offers, the majority are on standby until further notice. With no hope for the future, doubts, stress, and youth are all in a phase where the new normal is forging another path for them.

On my side, I was lucky enough to find a job in March 2020 before COVID-19 truly exploded. I still see that youth who managed to get a stable situation were pushed into creative activities and thinking. Staying home during lockdown, adapting their activities to the government policies. I am still glad that there is some positivity in our world and that we still manage to take the emerging opportunities. For instance, during International Women's Day, I, alongside four women organised a series of digital coffee talks about Cambodian women's health during COVID-19 with psychologists and sociologists. We talked to many women in leadership for their work-life balance and their resilience during the pandemic; I participated in a panel to talk about youth. Finally, we invited an anthropologist to talk about Cambodian women and the cultural heritage. The people we invited are not usually 'reachable' because they are busy and do not always agree to interviews. The circumstances pushed us to go digital and the positive point is that we can promote this content within the rural

areas and further our outreach! My individual point of view with youth is that we owe each other positivity, knowledge and support because that is what makes youth move forward.

All in all, finding support within society through communication, knowledge and empathy is crucial for us to become, be or keep being global citizens. You have heard it before, but we are stronger together and with solidarity we can make great things happen. As humans, we are not all as emotionally intelligent as one another but we are able to adapt fast so we need to help each other find this middle ground that will unite all parties, because no one is exempt from the pandemic. This should be a beautiful thing. I believe that positive minds make great impacts and I guess we could call it the 'art of living together'.

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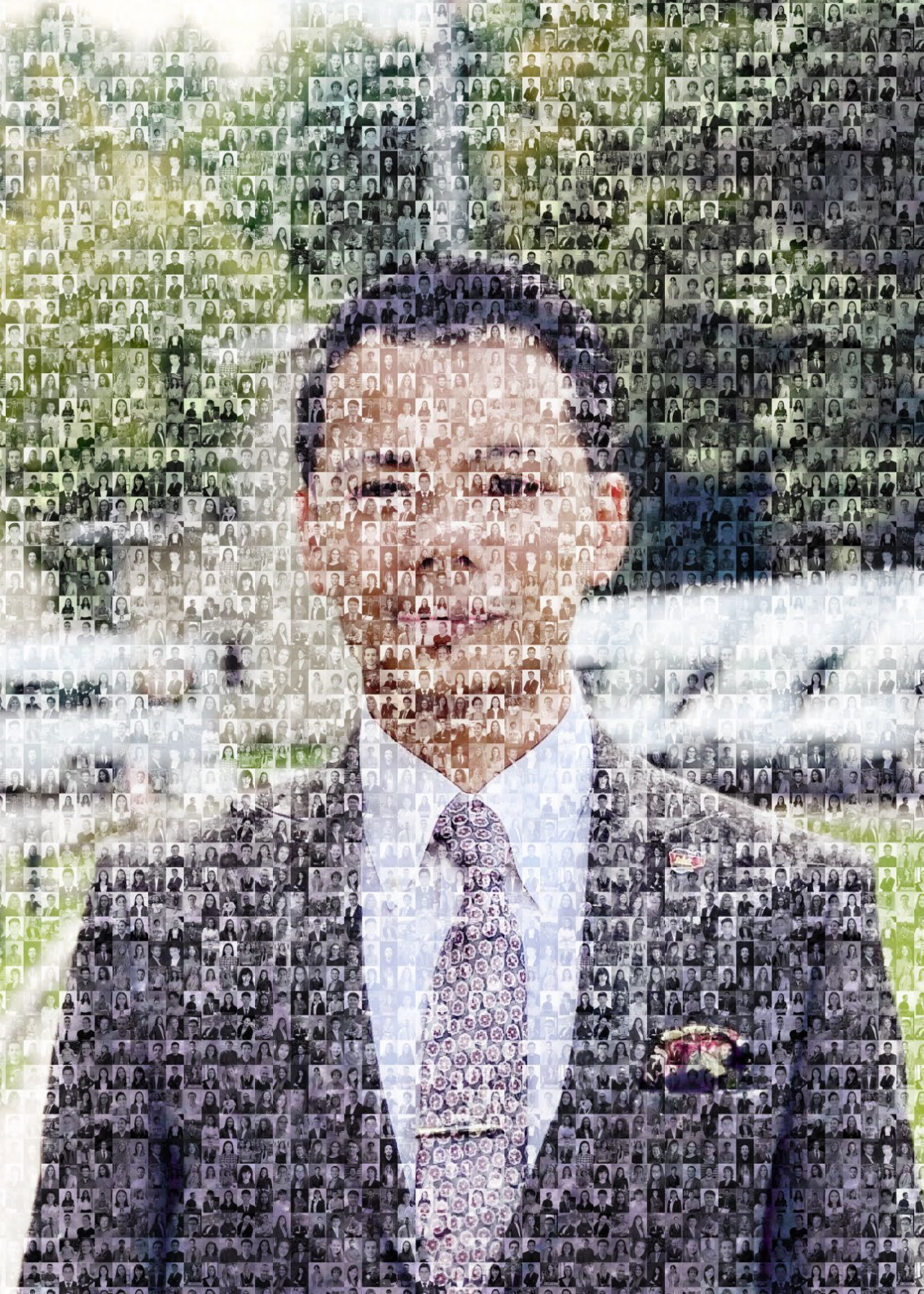
Sekar Vuthy, Cambodia

Finding a new equilibrium in our society

The COVID-19 pandemic has shaken the world to its core, creating immediate impacts on the social, economic and political spheres; but its enduring effects are likewise substantial. As the world evolves in order to adapt to the new normal, as global citizens and youths, we too must embark on a soul-searching journey of our own. Such journey must carefully consider our roles and duties in ensuring a safer and healthier society, and simultaneously seeking a new equilibrium in our society – one that is more equitable and inclusive.

Back to the basic of hygiene practices

We must reinforce the good basic practices of personal hygiene, which entail inter alia proper handwashing, preventive measures and seeking prompt medical attention when ill. The simplest measures and guidelines put forward by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and our governments can go a long way in keeping those around us safe and healthy.

Whilst social distancing induces our society to become less intimate and less personal, we must acknowledge its necessity amid the rampant spread of the virus.

Credible and responsible information sharing

During the pandemic, our reliance on social media platforms for daily information consumption has surged exponentially. This calls for more credible and responsible information sharing practices, especially by youth – the most active social media demographic. False information and partial truths can stir and pose danger in our society, physically and mentally.

In this respect, we must restore our faith in science and experts as opposed to mere lobbyists and political loyalists. We must carefully identify the source of information that we share, as well as consider its relevance in the context that prompts us to do so.

More importantly, we should take advantage of technology, such as social media platforms, to educate our families, friends and community about the pandemic, its impacts and so forth. In addition, we can use social media platforms as empowerment tools, where the voices of youth can be shared and heard to induce a more inclusive response from authorities.

At the same time, it is of utmost importance that we become a 'source of calm during this storm', as opposed to a force of hate and provocation. We must not fall victim to the superficial arguments anchored in prejudice, injustice and violence. We must also not fall victim to the (geo) political game that points fingers and incites xenophobia and exclusion.

Embracing volunteerism and social work

In the period of volatilities and uncertainties, we should assume certain responsibilities, especially towards the most vulnerable groups in our society. In other words, we must strive to offer them support and safety, wherever possible.

For instance, youths can seek opportunities to create positive changes in their community. It is apparent that the most vulnerable groups during the pandemic are the elderly, impoverished, immunocompromised, disabled, women, and

children. Every little gesture helps, including babysitting for the front-liners, grocery shopping for the unable, offering food and shelter to those in need, just to name a few.

Youth can also play a crucial role in bridging the digital gap by training the older generation to use modern technology, either for daily necessities or to simply stay connected with their loved ones during this social-distancing era. The same may apply to fellow youth and children, who have to navigate through online schooling. Support is particularly required for those who lack proper access to internet or even functional devices, not to mention those who are forced to quit school.

Whilst physical or direct volunteer work may not suit everyone, given social-distancing, lockdowns and personal preference, we can still contribute to great causes through monetary or non-monetary donations. This can be done locally, regionally and internationally.

Be ambitious and innovative

Given the rapid transformation of our society, youth have played a key role in engineering and innovation. Not only that we possess a (creative and unconventional) mindset to solve key challenges facing our society today, we are also in the most ideal position to fully utilise any cutting-edge tools and devices at our disposal.

Youths from across the globe have found inventive methods to efficiently respond to the pandemic, including by encouraging the use of hand-sanitisers through fun or affordable ways, producing multi-language leaflets of safety guidelines to least developed countries, creating mobile apps to share and store information on disease prevention, swiftly manufacturing operative personal protective equipment, promoting mitigation measures through arts, etc.

It is also important that these research and development efforts are supported and endorsed by public and private sector so that their effectiveness can be sustainable.

Asking the tough questions

Without a doubt, our actions today will impact our well-being tomorrow. We must consider accordingly the possibility of, or even expect another pandemic in the future. There are a range of questions that remain unanswered since the outbreak.

As global citizens, we have the right to the truth. For one, what actually caused the COVID-19 pandemic? Whilst it is true that some questions are harder to answer than others, the politicisation of this matter is detrimental for the good of our society, particularly in the long term.

Second, we must question the readiness and preparedness of our governments and the world for the next epidemic and/or pandemic. As a matter of fact, we were warned years prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. Still, we did not pay sufficient attention to these warnings. This coincidentally ties into the climate issues, where alerts and warnings have been persistent but oftentimes ignored. It is important that we take this opportunity to put more pressure on the governments, as well as the private sectors, to be more accountable especially in times of crisis. This may include the fight for a better healthcare system, poverty and inequality reduction, and basic security and well-being assurance, inter alia.

Bottom line

Despite being labelled as the recovery period, 2021 is only the first step of a whole new chapter of world history. Humanity will have to deal with a new paradigm of life, and the transition period would take years. In the midst of uncertainties, there is a constant – we all live on one planet earth. Although we are physically distant from one another, the contemporary globalised society proves that our well-being is interconnected and interdependent.

For these reasons, we should do everything in our power to ensure that our actions produce positive spill-over effects for others, which would

come back around to us. We youths must do our part to promote a safer and healthier world, whilst upholding equity and inclusiveness.

"The common expression "to wash one's hands of something," usually means to absolve oneself of responsibility for something. In the current global crisis, the meaning seems to have been turned on its head. In washing our hands today, we are accepting, embracing our responsibility for others wherever they are. As we gaze upon the road ahead, may we similarly embrace our responsibility for the most vulnerable and for all victims of human rights violations all over the world."

(Travesí, 2020)

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Dean Chen, China

COVID-19: a magnifier of individual and collective connectedness

In a polarised world with growing individualism and rising nationalism, where slogans such as 'Make America Great Again' echo, the very idea of 'global citizens' seems to be nothing but delirious fiction. Former British Prime Minister Theresa May said "If you believe you are a citizen of the world, then you are a citizen of nowhere."

Surely, we are just individuals going about our lives. Why do Syrian refugees, rising sea-levels threatening small island nations, or burning rainforests in the Amazon even matter? After all, we owe those distant peoples and nations nothing.

This seems to be the very idea crossing through many people's minds when a mysterious virus was first reported in Wuhan, China. Ah, just another virus in a distant country.

But the following story is one of collective failure. The COVID-19 pandemic is still raging in many countries, taking lives, weighing on the economy and people's livelihoods. People in all continents experienced, and some are still going through, lockdowns, social distancing and mask-wearing – something once perceived as utterly bizarre in some cultures. What seemed to be normal – eating out, club nights, concerts – remain out of reach in parts of the world.

The pandemic has shown that we are inextricably connected citizens of the world. COVID-19 is a magnifier of how individual actions are linked to collective wellbeing. Whether to wear a facemask, keep our distance from each other, travelling abroad, or organising a party can have real impact on others' lives.

In countries where individuals follow health regulations such as social distancing, mask-wearing, regular handwashing and travel restrictions, the pandemic has been curbed relatively quick, with less infections and deaths. China, Korea, Singapore and Viet Nam are examples, registering four-digit or merely two-digit deaths (World Health Organization, 2021).

Whereas in countries where individuals defy health regulations and even the very existence of the pandemic, the virus has spread more widely, mutated and taken more lives. People are suffering from longer and repeated lockdowns and movement restrictions. Ironically, developed countries in Europe and North America, despite their advanced healthcare systems, have registered hundreds of thousands of deaths (World Health Organization, 2021).

My personal experience speaks to this contrast. When the pandemic started, I was in Switzerland, one of the richest countries in the world. Swiss people's initial reaction to COVID-19 was little more than indifference, some even complained about the 'hysteria' of the media about the virus. No precautionary measures such as temperature checks in public spaces were in place. But 3 weeks after the first case entered the country from Italy in late February, cases in Switzerland skyrocketed – 'stay home' orders were issued. In late April, I returned to China. Upon arrival, I experienced the strictest health protocols in my life – temperature checks, PCR tests, epidemiological investigations, and a 14-day mandatory quarantine in a hotel. Getting out of quarantine, I returned to a world where things were largely back to normal – people were enjoying food and drinks at restaurants, bars and

clubs, going to cinemas, theatres and swimming pools, except that everyone wore masks in public spaces and travel was still limited. The normality continued in China, whereas in Europe, most of my friends went back to lockdown after a short summer of relative freedom.

By modifying individual behaviours with collective responsibilities in mind, the overall outcome is likely to be more positive for everyone. On the contrary, if individuals, or at least a significant portion of them choose to prioritise short-term personal interests over the greater good, society at large could suffer from more painful consequences.

So, how do we as an interconnected global community act together to keep our world safe and healthy? As youth, we have our unique value. We are innovative, dynamic, well-connected and highly adaptable. We are responsible for, and capable to be part of the solution, not the problem.

First, follow health regulations. Yes, a lot of us might feel the fatigue of wearing a mask whenever going out or being indoors for too long. But as scientific studies have shown, "children and young adults were found to be potentially much more important to transmitting the virus", it is even more important that we stick to the rules and avoid spreading the virus unintentionally (Kelly, 2020).

Second, show compassion and support to your family, friends and communities. A potentially larger health crisis is one of psychological nature – the social isolation due to social distancing and travel restrictions mean that many people are unable to access support systems important for wellbeing. Check on your loved ones regularly, organise virtual social sessions, volunteer at a local charity caring for the elderly, speak out against race-based hatred related to the virus – spread love, not the virus.

Third, fact-check before spreading information. As an ultra-connected generation, we are exposed to an ocean of information every day. Fake news and conspiracy theories could lead to 'infodemics' that generate hatred and deteriorate the health situation. Ask yourself: is the source credible? Is the logic of the information sound? Think twice before clicking that 'share', 'comment' or 'like' button.

Fourth, be creative and act. The pandemic is also an opportunity to rethink the ways we consume and live, and to act for a more sustainable, resilient world. Students produced hand sanitisers on campus, young entrepreneurs made masks for health workers etc (Hobson, 2020; Université Gaston Berger, 2020). Starting from local, concrete projects, our collective actions can have a global impact.

The pandemic is a reminder that crises can unfold if we fail to balance between individual rights and collective responsibilities. If we do not learn from the current crisis, future crises could well be possible or even more serious.

As global citizens, we owe each other. It is our collective responsibility to rethink and reshape the ways we behave to be in harmony with nature and our fellow humans, so that we can all be safer and healthier during this pandemic and beyond. As youth, let us be responsible, compassionate, creative and active in creating a healthier and safer world.

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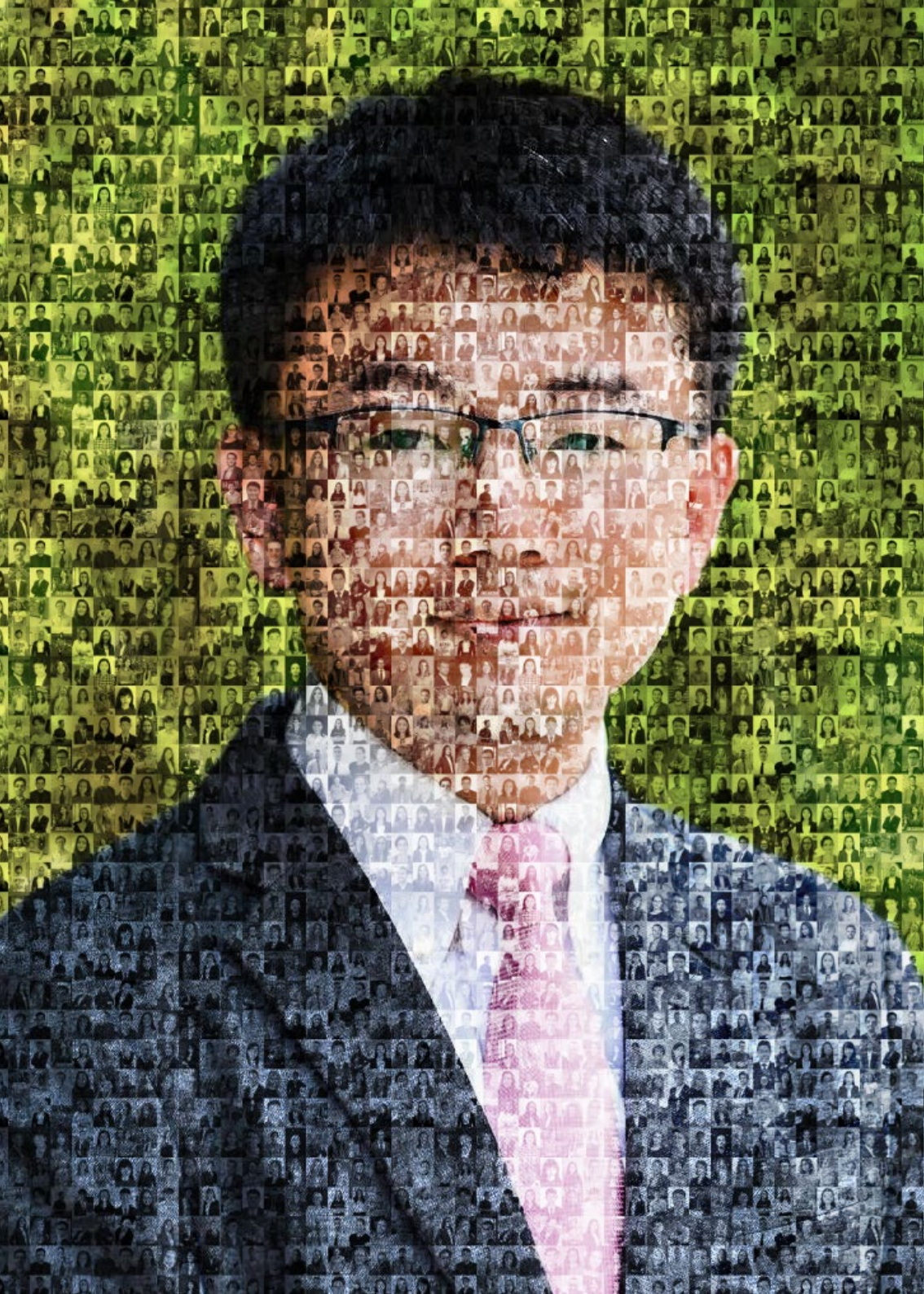
Nan Hao, China

Behind the veil of ignorance, ideologies and doctrine

The sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 virus was obviously a challenge to the medical capacities, socio-economic systems and even values and ideologies of different countries. As the virus soon scaled up to be a global pandemic, it has taken away numerous beloved people, disrupted social exchanges and shut down various business activities. Until today, the world is still suffering from the impacts of the pandemic, seeing the death toll again and again peak at unbelievable numbers.

Amid the pandemic, countries have yielded different performances, and this seems not necessarily linked with their own medical capacities and public health systems. Rather, it has been attached with a dimension that is largely related to cultures, values and even politicised and stained with ideologies. The World Health Organisation (WHO) advised people to wear masks and self-discipline to reduce gathering and mobility. However, the two simple things have incurred different responses, and ultimately caused different consequences in different countries.

The United States, enjoying the widely recognised best infectious disease manpower, medical capacities and public health emergency systems, wasted a few months after the WHO and Chinese government's notification, and launched stigmatisation campaigns to attack the first victim, China. Wearing masks and self-quarantine were elevated to become an issue of significance in political ideology, religious beliefs and personal principles, which hindered societies to make prompt actions to prevent and control the pandemic spreading. In contrast, East Asian countries and citizens, well-known

for the collectivism that is different from Western individualism, received cooperative behaviour from citizens after the governments and medical professionals called upon them to wear masks and remain social distancing. Statistically, countries in East Asia, though suffering from the very first waves of the pandemic spreading, recorded much fewer deaths. Meanwhile, they also managed to take the lead in socio-economic recovery and revitalisation. Some of these countries are even traditionally categorised as less developed countries with much lower medical capacities.

It is obviously true that culture, values and principles of a certain society indeed impact the prevention and control of the pandemic. However, it might not be appropriate to overstate such differences and widen the differences to be associated with certain ideologies. Even in this globalised world, it is still natural that people of different cultural backgrounds cling to the cultures they were born in, but it might also become an ethical obligation for people, especially youth to try to be open to and understand more other cultures. This is not simply to experience food, costume and landscape, but to learn about history, ethics and philosophy.

Individualism is essential for Western countries, as it played a significant role in the Renaissance and Enlightenment. Many great Western intellectuals championing such individualism, studied deep down into humanities, and looked far out at the universe. All these efforts extended humankind's horizons and margins of the knowledge and ushered the human society into modernisation and civilisation. However, the

individualism amid the pandemic that stubbornly prioritises individual freedom and rights seems to be at the expense of others' safety and social security.

Collectivism once significantly hindered the East Asian societies to progress into the modern civilisation. It suppressed innovation, creativity, initiative and pioneers. It imposed group psychology, conservatism and social pressure onto each individual to conform to each other, especially to the senior and elder people. However, such order-preferred collectivism also yields significant dividends in the process of economic catch-up and social governance. Generations of people sacrificed their life and happiness to contribute to elevating the nation as a whole up to upper middle-income level and even advanced economy within such a few-decades that the Western counterparts spent around a century working towards. Amid the pandemic, East Asian citizens' preference of order and collective gains over individual gains is proved to be effective again.

As we have seen from the headlines of world major news outlets, some critics in the West are attacking and attributing the virus to East Asian countries, and East Asian-looking people in the West are also treated harshly. It is true that the virus has cost a lot even beyond our affordability. However, instead of indulging themselves in the emotions and the established values and behavioural patterns, people, especially young people, need to penetrate through the veil of ignorance to try to decouple the specific actions with a certain ideology and doctrine.

Amongst a group of people, it would always be helpful to have empathy, sympathy, mutual understanding and two-way caring. The same intuition applies to a larger group of people, be it a nation or a region, as well. Based on my personal experience, many Western critics are in fact nice people in their private lives, having such empathy, sympathy, mutual understanding and two-way caring towards each other. However, once things elevate to a higher level, for example, international level, they tend to forget the real humans behind the abstract categorisations like nations.

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Svea Kučinić, Croatia

Individuals are not independent units

Try to take away someone's freedom and I will usually be on the front lines of defence. However, I do believe that we have started confusing freedom with selfishness, needs with wants, and rights with privileges. There is an old principle: your freedom ends where mine begins. It means that our individual rights and freedoms can never come at the price of someone else's. This is even formalised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Article 29, Section 2:

"In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society."

When the pandemic started there were mixed reactions among the people closest to me. Some, like me, felt immense fear – not only for us, but also for our loved ones who are significantly more at-risk. This fear, expectedly, led to a need to feel at least a bit in control and as if we were doing something to keep ourselves and those dear to us safe. We wore masks religiously, stayed at home as much as possible, limited all social interactions for months, and disinfected our hands raw daily. Others, however, focused more on what they perceived was a limitation of their freedom. That reaction, too, is human and understandable. We have all lost so much in the past year – our sense of normality, our routines and sources of comfort, risk-free human contact, maybe even our jobs or our loved ones. I cannot deny, however, that there was a feeling of frustration and unfairness that came from witnessing the disparity in

thinking between those who saw adhering to the preventative measures as a collective obligation and those who saw it exclusively as a personal choice. Those who chose to oppose the preventative measures based their actions in the rationale that they either didn't believe in the pandemic, were convinced it was a conspiracy, or simply weren't concerned about getting sick. Their line of thinking was somehow impermeable to the other side's argument that even if they were not worried for themselves or didn't even believe the danger is real, they should still adhere to the measures to help to protect others – those who are at a greater risk and those who very much fear the potential consequences.

For example, as a former education worker, I witnessed daily email-exchanges with parents who argued that the school was infringing on their teenage children's human rights by asking them to wear a mask. It was a simple request, made to ensure safety for our students and staff alike, not that different from asking them to adhere to the regular school dress code (something no parent ever argued with, even though its basis is far more arbitrary, and its practical effects are far less important than those of mask-wearing). To put things in perspective, several of the teachers I worked with came from severely at-risk groups, but decided to work anyway, to try and provide the students with a sense of normality, despite the literally life-threatening risk it posed to them. But even when presented with this information, several parents kept insisting that their children be allowed to attend school without a mask, some citing incorrect medical explanations, whilst others just kept insisting mask-wearing

was an attack on their children's rights to a normal childhood.

Now, I am not one for mindless rule-following. Critical thinking and information literacy are indispensable skills in today's world and, admittedly, there was a lot of confusing, contradicting information at the beginning of the pandemic – do masks really work? What's the appropriate distance that keeps us safe? Does the virus survive on non-animate objects? How does it really spread? New information cropped up daily and the onslaught only contributed to the general insecurity and confusion. Thus, I can understand a certain level of scepticism, at the beginning, towards the authorities and their instructions (and maybe even later on, when those in power hypocritically started breaking the same rules, they were asking us to adhere to).

However, what I could not (and still cannot) understand was the spiteful resistance towards a precaution measure as simple as wearing a mask, even if the effectiveness still wasn't 100% proven. If there was even a slight chance that wearing a mask allowed us to protect others, shouldn't we have jumped at the opportunity? At worst, the masks won't work, and we will be slightly inconvenienced by wearing them. At best, they will work, and we will have helped protect those around us.

I have been trying to find nuance or to explore the different sides of this issue, but try as I might, I keep coming to the same conclusion: we are forgetting the meaning of society. A due disclaimer: I am speaking from a western perspective, which differs wildly in this aspect from the Asian one. But from where I'm standing, we are sinking further and further into a dangerous kind of individualism that does not include any sort of delay of gratification, solidarity, social responsibility, general welfare, or the idea of sacrificing a little bit of our own comfort for the greater good. An individualism which only talks about rights, but not about responsibilities.

In this destructive individualism, the individual is perceived as an independent unit (when, in reality, they are not), unbeholden to anyone but themselves. Individual choices are made regardless of their effects on others. There is no responsibility to anyone but themselves (or if there is, it comes in at a distant second place). And yet, at the same time, that same individual is desperately reliant on society in numerous ways, from food supply, transport, education to healthcare. An example: an anti-masker will proudly declare it their individual right not to wear a mask, thus directly or indirectly endangering others, but if they contract COVID-19, they won't hesitate to rely on the public healthcare system to treat them. A healthcare system funded, staffed, and operated by the same people they chose to endanger with their personal choices.

In conclusion, I do believe we owe each other the collective social responsibility of recognising that our needs and our wants are not the same thing and that just because something displeases or inconveniences us does not automatically mean our rights are being violated. Whilst wearing a mask might be uncomfortable, asking someone to wear it is not a violation of their human rights. It is not our right to endanger someone else's health just because we don't like being told what to do. Whilst social contact is a need, engaging in it in irresponsible ways is a want. And whilst being able to make decisions and choices regarding our own life is a freedom, doing so with no regard for the health and safety of others, effectively ignoring the responsibilities that come with being a member of society, whilst at the same time continuing to use all the benefits that come from living in a society, is selfishness.

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Kaja Pavlinić, Croatia

Can we trust youth with our own lives?

It was February 2020. I was sitting at the airport in Brussels, talking to my grandma over the phone and waiting for my evening plane to Zagreb. She was telling me keep a distance from other people because there is this new virus circulating around – at least that's what she heard on the TV. I laughed really hard and told her it's 2020 and there is no way something as little as a virus could overtake our communities and do something bad to us. The world is too advanced for that.

Little did I know that only a month after, I would find myself in the first lockdown, with police circling the streets and telling people to get back to their houses – something my parents haven't experienced since the Yugoslav War. The world shut down overnight. Children and teens had to switch to online school and Zoom quickly became my greatest ally in wrapping up my university studies. In the past 12 months, I haven't been able to celebrate some of the most important moments of my life – my birthday, getting my master's degree, landing my first real job in the IT industry, starting my own company. However, some young people had it way worse – whilst I was able to find my own happiness and got used to the 'new normal', they were stuck at home with abusive family members or lost their loved ones due to COVID-19. Unfortunately, it was too much for some of them and they decided to end their own lives. There was a lot of strain put on youth, and some governments, like the Croatian one, have done little to help them – there were no relief packages to improve their economic situation and over 22.4% of university students lost their student jobs they needed to provide for themselves, according to the research on 630 university students conducted by my NGO Sustainable Development Forum Green Window.

With these thoughts in mind, I decided to scroll away my worries through Instagram Stories one Friday. What I was able to see is a parallel universe to the life me and many other young people have been living for the past 12 months – many young people have been attending massive gatherings with several thousands of them in one small area. They have been drinking in public places in Zagreb and other cities and were hanging out without respecting any social distancing measures that are still obligatory in Croatia. I felt mad – extremely mad. Most of us have given up on all social contact, travelling and seeing our friends to protect our loved ones and the community in general, whilst some individuals keep partying like there is no pandemic (Rogulj, 2021).

Along with many of them catching a disease a mere 5 days after, they also left an incredible amount of trash behind them:

When the media outlets started writing about this, they defended these individuals by claiming COVID-19 is just a conspiracy and that the disease itself is nothing worse than a small flu. For the first time in my life, I felt truly helpless and asked myself – is my life and the life of my loved ones really in danger because of young people?

As my initial anger started to settle down, I tried to find different arguments and explanations for what was happening. Here are some of the main ones:

1) Young people don't have proper role models. In the past year, the members of our Civil Protection Headquarters of the Republic of Croatia, have been caught multiple times attending large group gatherings, masses in churches that didn't respect social distancing, and other private events. Additionally, there is a high level of antivaxxers among adults in Croatia, meaning many of them carry similar values over to their children. If there is no one to lead by example, how can we expect young people to figure out for themselves how to behave in such an unprecedented situation?

2) The pandemic has had a huge hit on everyone's mental health, but especially on young people. Young people are still in development and their brains often cannot process trauma, fear and all other negative emotions as effectively (Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health, 2018). The way they react is influenced by how they are trying to deal with the current situation.

3) Although the media outlets are more focused on young people who are partying and not respecting any measures currently in place, there are many NGOs led by young people who are trying to raise awareness about the importance of fact checking and respecting all measures in order to protect ourselves from COVID-19. Many young people have invested significant efforts to organise various activities and online projects for other young people to participate in, with the aim of creating at least some opportunities for self-development and growth.

4) Since this is an unexpected crisis, the Croatian government has shifted its focus on dealing with the overflowing hospitals, the economic situation, obtaining enough vaccines and other issues that arose. However, they have lost young people in their sights and missed to chance to help the ones who are heavily impacted by this situation and will carry our entire community on their shoulders in the future decades.

Overall, my conclusion would be that we shouldn't react impulsively and let isolated incidents affect the way we perceive youth. Just as many others, young people have their own set of challenges during this pandemic and the least we can do is provide full support in the form of relief packages and offering support when it comes to mental health. It would be a shame for these happenings to overshadow all the great things young people are doing in our communities. We should all judge less and try to provide support where we can. Who knows – maybe by doing this, we will create a much better community post-pandemic than we have ever imagined.

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Charalampos Christodoulou, Cyprus

A social experiment that cannot fail

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we, as citizens of the world, have been forced to assimilate new and 'weird' behaviours into our everyday lives. Behaviours with a main purpose to show individual and collective responsibility as we used to hear always. Social isolation, work from home, constant wearing of the mask and physical distancing, are some of the characteristics of our new lifestyle. Having gone through all this, a very clear question arises. To what extent are the youth generation, to which I also belong, as active individuals and members of society, responsible for this excessive collective responsibility and required to comply with the respective health instructions?

Thankfully, social isolation was a social experiment for me, that allowed me to take the time to converse with myself and draw some conclusions. As a young person, I was quite reluctant to accept the new order of things. I was outraged that I could not see my grandparents, even when I knew that this was for their protection. I was upset that I could not continue my studies with a physical presence. I was shocked by the fact that I could not go out with my partner and my friends to have fun.

The above conclusions were not only part of my own thoughts, but they constitute the pulse of society as a whole. According to scientists, the largest spread of the COVID-19 occurs within the age group of 18-45. It is the group of citizens, that seeks the least obedience to the measures of the states, and they are the main parts of the transmission chain. Such behaviour puts older people at risk, those who are more vulnerable to

the disease and show greater compliance with the measures.

Many times, I found myself thinking about not following the instructions of the government directives, that had been imposed on me. The measures that citizens were called upon to implement, were found to be contrary to the fundamental freedoms as defined by the European Union single market. We have seen that core values such as, free movement of citizens, services and goods have been restricted. Daily quarantine, moving out of the house only with a permit, free movement across the borders and the inability to freely provide my work, are some examples of these values and some may argue, human rights, that have been violated.

It is necessary for me to mention, that I am studying to become a Doctor of Medicine. At my University, the University of Patras, at the end of my studies, I will be called to swear in the oath of Hippocrates, the father of medicine, whose sole purpose was to dedicate his life to human beings. A characteristic point of the oath states "Into whatsoever houses I enter, I will enter to help the sick, and I will abstain from all intentional wrong-doing and harm".

As I have pointed out above, the period of extraordinary circumstances we are going through was a social experiment for me. Every day I had to get used to dealing with the words, virus, pandemic, hospitalisation, cure, death and vaccination, mainly due to my medical studies. Every day I was confronted with the dilemmas

of individual responsibility towards others, as I have to represent or of individual interest. My message that comes out, in conclusion, and is very loud, is that when the most valuable good of human life is at stake, self-interest should not prevail and be imposed on others.

Here it is worth mentioning, the failed strategy of many governments during the pandemic in the face of the attempt of excessive relaxation. By studying measures not taken by various countries, such as the United Kingdom in the first wave in March, Sweden, as well as the USA, aiming to achieve herd immunity, everyone can realise the failure. Not only they did not achieve their original goal of immunity, but they set a bad example around the world, in terms of irresponsibility to protect their citizens. These countries were faced with huge increases in daily cases and hospitalisations, in contrast with countries that had taken actions early.

To answer the initial question I asked, it is worthwhile for us young people to try. To protect the good of life, whether it concerns us or our relatives and friends. To protect the health system that fights every day to keep our fellow citizens alive and the economy of every state that stands in the face of the onslaught of collapse. On the other side, however, government decisions should be made with the utmost respect for the basic freedoms of the people, without any attempt to degrade them due to irrational and unscientific political decisions. This will be an incentive for young people, to continue to ensure the social well-being of our society.

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Alexandros Georgiadis, Cyprus

Passing the human decency test

We owe nothing to anyone, but at the same time, we owe everything to everyone. What is most important? Personal satisfaction or overall prosperity? From the moment state officials chose, and consciously allowed the path to redemption from this pandemic to be influenced by economic interests, we have FAILED. We have failed in the human decency test. We have a responsibility for a better future for the generations to come. A moral obligation: you can call it that. It has many names. What ethical obligation are they talking about? The only thing left for young people is hope. A bright sunbeam in all this darkness that we keep sinking further into daily. It is not just a matter of the financial misery that some are already experiencing, and others will experience, because of the pandemic mismanagement, it is also what we have been unfairly burdened with all this time in the field of mental health.

From the first moment, young people were the first to discipline themselves in the measures against COVID-19, urging older generations to comply accordingly. A little misinformation, a little ignorance or worse semi-learning have played and still play a decisive role in people's behaviours. Sometimes in the right way and sometimes with a strict way we managed to pass the criticality of the situation to the elderly and the vulnerable groups. After all this effort, the political leaderships of Greece and Cyprus began to confuse and contradict, for example the need to use masks in public places. On the one hand, telling the citizens that it is not necessary for everyone to wear masks and on the other hand within a few days they imposed a mandatory use of masks and whoever does

not comply, has to pay a fine of 300 euros. I find it very important to mention that several political leaders have made the mistake of referring to COVID-19 as a simple flu, giving the common people the right to even question its existence. Based on the above, the lack of proper communication of the scientific/medical sector pushed some citizens to revolt and disobey any measures, believing that everything is a conspiracy to abolish individual freedom and human rights.

Here's the battle the World Health Organisation lost. Personally, I remember in March 2020 hearing the announcement by the WHO that it would not call the whole situation a pandemic but would remain in the definition of an epidemic. "It is not possible," I said, "how come they have not yet imposed the global lockdown, what are they waiting for? Should the numbers go up so that they can justify it? If so, then what is the value of human life? Are we just numbers in their eyes?" Of course, these were all reasonable questions about something so unknown to all of us.

Too many of us have lost people during the pandemic and I, myself, am no exception. One would think that with so many victims it would be unthinkable to question the danger, let alone the existence of COVID-19. Unfortunately, once again, the hospital process and the bureaucracy give the right to challenge again. What do I mean by that? When Sotiris Tsiodras, a Greek internal medicine physician, specialising in infectious diseases, in charge of Greece's management of the COVID-19 crisis, himself mentioned that the victim list of COVID-19 includes people who died

from COVID-19 and those who had COVID-19 and died from another cause, he created an impression of deliberate misinformation.

It is easy for any sane person to realise that state officials are also human beings and that they will also make mistakes. But this can't be used as an excuse for their wrong decisions. Much of the world has now turned against the state and the law. Violent law enforcement along with the authoritarianism of some police officers lead to a backlash. Violence brings violence. An eye for an eye.

In all this chaos that prevails, the possibility of maintaining a healthy and secure society is increasingly being pushed away. Here comes the philosophical question, 'what is justice?' This question concerns Michael Joseph Sandel, an American political philosopher and Professor of Government Theory at Harvard University Law School. In his book "What is Justice?" he mentions three different ways of approaching justice. One says that justice means maximising benefits or prosperity – the greater happiness for the greater number. The second says that justice is respect for the freedom of choice – either the real choices that individuals make in a free market or the hypothetical choices that individuals would make in an initial position of equality. The third one says justice presupposes the cultivation of virtue and consultation around the common good.

If a just society presupposes collective reflection on well-being, the question that arises is 'what kind of political discourse would lead us in this direction?' Most political debates today revolve around prosperity and freedom – increasing economic output and respecting the rights of individuals. The challenge for us is to imagine a policy that takes ethical and spiritual issues seriously but connects them to broader economic and social concerns. This is the moral obligation of all of us and specifically of the new generation.

'The road is long, at least we will cross it together'

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Ludmila Filipová, Czech Republic

Our lives are not our own, they belong to others

Humans are naturally selfish, a trait we inherited over centuries of fighting for survival in the worst conditions. Living in hostile environments required us to strategically place one's own survival at the top of the list of priorities and fight over resources with others, no matter the costs. Even Adam Smith acknowledges the self-interest seeking in humans but argues that it, contrary to the popular belief, serves a greater good in the long run. Self-interest has an utmost importance in driving economic activity within the state. Sometimes selfishness can lead to good and desirable outcomes for the whole society. Sometimes however, humans must put aside their individualistic preferences and act purposefully in a collective manner.

Our lives are not our own, they belong to others. As babies in the mother's womb, we rely on her choices that determine our well-being. After we are born, we are still reliant on the mercy of others, which continues until our last breath. Whilst we need to prioritise our own survival, we are also fully dependent on the collective society. A society is an organised community that aims to maximise the well-being of its members and citizens. A lot of what we need for individual survival is provided by the order the society follows – we can for example achieve our professional goals because society is set to provide us with quality education for minimal costs. To truly live, rather than survive, we are dependent on social laws and structures in our world. And because others are willing to let us participate in it as well, we owe one another in return.

The first waves of the pandemic generated global chaos, fear, and anxiety. No one knew what we were up against, and no government was certain in its steps in subduing the pandemic. China seemed far away, and so did its virus problem. It soon however became clear that this problem will be global and will have horrendous consequences if nothing is done. Social distancing, requirements to wear masks and national lockdowns were the first and most common strategies against COVID-19. Several services were banned from operating, such are unessential shops and restaurants. Whilst the law is usually set to give freedom within social limits to its citizens, in many countries citizens were limited by it more than ever. In the Czech Republic, a country with a 'heavy lockdown' currently in place, all educational in-person activities are suspended, and where no one can leave the area, they live in without a proper permission form. Leisure-time activities and free-movement are so limited that the only thing left is to stay at home, alone, and wait for the situation to get better. All these restrictions evoke many questions – can the government limit my life on such scale? Why should I care? Am I even responsible? Or one darker thought – won't we all die eventually? Shouldn't we let nature 'do its thing'?

Early on, we witnessed a prompt activation of civil society and an increase in solidarity and empathy. Later, these feelings were slowly transformed into impatience and rage, reinforced by the constant restraints on individual rights. Should we act responsibly, follow the restrictions, and give up our individual rights for the sake of others? Do we owe it to others? First and foremost, relationships we have with other humans are not transaction based. Hence, the self-interest law of Adam

Smith does not apply here. There is no good collective outcome from selfish acts in relationships. What makes humans unique is our ability to do something good for the others without the need for reward. Often, we help someone because we can project ourselves into their situation, put ourselves in their shoes, have empathy. Whatever the other person is feeling – a loss when a loved one passed due to COVID-19 complications, a loneliness from staying home all day... we know what it is like because we either found ourselves in that very same situation or because we can imagine what it is like. But do we have to have empathy towards others? Of course, we can choose to ignore the struggle of others and prioritise solely our own well-being. However, we DO OWE empathy to others. When we were born, we joined a collective society and indirectly agreed to follow its inner laws and rules, including the moral ones. We are always free to leave this society, live a secluded life in the middle of nowhere, however, as long as we are part of it, the others are being empathetic towards us and that is what we owe in return as well. We have an ethical obligation to consider the well-being of others along with ours and if that entails wearing masks or staying home, we better put that mask on and stay home.

To sum up, whilst acting in self-interests is one of the laws of economics that leads to positive societal outcomes, as members of society, we signed an invisible social contract with other citizens to also follow certain social and moral rules. That includes one that sets us apart from animals, the moral rule of empathy and the ability to understand someone's dire situation. Since others have been acting on this moral rule since our birth, we owe it to them too. If we remain members of the collective, we should respect others and consider their well-being along with ours. If that entails losing certain individual liberties, so be it, our lives are not our own, they belong to others.

Ludmila Filipová
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Dennis Nielsen, Denmark

Systemic change for individual freedom

Across the planet we see all sorts of creatures go out of their way to co-operate with one another. A flower produces nectar to attract bees not because it would be fun to have a little yellow buzzer around, but because it brings benefits to the flower itself. Of course, a flower does not 'choose' to produce nectar, it simply does so because it proved the best way to survive, but the end result remains the same.

Likewise, we humans do not live in communities because of mere benevolence, it is simply in the interest of the individual to be part of a protective community. Indeed, Sartre (1943) argues that one only truly exists in relation to the Other. It doesn't matter whether you're an eagle or a rabbit if you're alone in the wilderness, because the labels predator and prey relate to the other as much as to oneself. COVID-19 restrictions exist to prevent us from being eagles. Our wings are clipped, so we cannot fly around; we wear facemasks to cover our sharp beaks; and we dull our claws with hand sanitiser. This is not a perfect analogy, because we don't eat our elders, but it does illustrate that the restrictions are protection mechanisms largely put in place to secure one group of society against another. Important to note, however, if the community does not protect the eagle's concerns as well, that young eagle will either leave or revolt.

Ethical risk management

One of the most common battlegrounds in human coexistence is the different emphasis put on the rights of the individual versus survival of the community. But if the people most vulnerable to COVID-19 are a minority, shouldn't the majority have the greatest say? Utilitarianism,

where actions taken should be those that result in the greatest collective happiness, immediately seems logical, but there is an intrinsic flaw in the immeasurability of happiness in the first place (Mill, 1863). So, although some utilitarian perspective naturally has its place in political decision making, a morally just society cannot rest on this maxim alone, because 'good' is neither calculable nor a constant thus bringing uncertainty rather than safety. The foundation of a just society invariably needs to be primarily ruled by Immanuel Kant's categorial imperative leading to universally applicable laws. Unfortunately, universally applicable laws are hard to agree on.

When protection is the management of risks through risk calculation, our post-modern society is what Ulrich Beck calls risk society. It is a society in which we are surrounded by often invisible, and in any case too many possible, risks to cope with as humans, thus we must rely on the collected efforts of the community to manage risks for all (Beck, 1992). In a healthy society, individual inputs and arguments will be scrutinised by the rest of society to arrive at the best options for all. This makes citizens stakeholders instead of mere subjects. It is "government of the people, by the people, for the people", and it limits the negative trade-off for the individual in order to accommodate to society (Lincoln, 1863).

COVID-19 comes with asymmetric risk factors that challenge our traditional way of calculating risk. But whilst some parts of society are in greater danger than others, it is still in the interest of the whole society to keep its entirety safe. In other words, if society is to succeed,

systemic solutions are needed instead of relying on the virtuous ethics of the individual, as this would have paved a massive highway for freewheelers. Thus, a community is defined by having boundaries and rules. No community exists without limits to individual freedoms; such an arrangement is called anarchy. An example is that we do allow people to drive their own cars, but we do not allow them to do so in whatever fashion they prefer. Traffic rules limit individual freedoms, but they do so to manage risk to the benefit of the individual; not to the benefit of the community itself.

Because the risk associated with social gatherings etc. are both asymmetric and difficult to manage, it is morally required by any citizen – regardless of circumstance – to act in a way that does not pose a risk to others insofar that this in turn does not cause even greater harm to themselves. This is why people with respiratory difficulties are often exempt from wearing masks in places where other people are required to do exactly that. Now, does that require the same people with for instance asthma to expose themselves to the public without masks as little as possible? For the same reason, the answer is 'yes', and the key words here are 'as little as possible'. Moral living is a constant calculation of risk with several unknown and incalculable factors, consequently, there are no ultimate answers, but the question always reverts back to Kant's categorical imperative. If everyone did this, would it be a problem?

Selfish generosity

Initially, the rights of the individual seem to suffer on account of 'the greater good', but breaking pandemic rules literally puts others at danger, thus upholding good 'pandemic ethics' safeguards the individual from asymmetric and transcendent risks. Of course these 'pandemic ethics' need to be flexible to accommodate change as needed and asked for by stakeholders, but what is new in this COVID-19 world is the realisation of both global reliance and reality. Total lockdowns were imposed round the globe thus producing a globally shared

reality. From Guatemala to Hong Kong, from Melbourne to Bangalore. Everyone I talked to were holed up with their families wherever they lived, and we were all just waiting. Waiting for the world to return to normal became an active action to achieve progress. We all followed the death tolls in New York City, and people around the globe saw the pictures from Italian hospitals on the brink of functional collapse. The mantras of 'avoiding Italian conditions' suddenly became arguments for rapid and efficient local action.

Ulrich Beck used his theory of risk society to lament world leaders for not taking sufficient action against environmental catastrophes in particular, but the pandemic has proven that swift and global change is indeed possible, even when faced with extreme costs. Thus, we must conclude that the problem lies in the apparent inability for stakeholders to visualise and communicate significance and urgency rather than intrinsic flaws in global co-operation itself. This frees the individual from personal guilt and responsibility and puts shared responsibilities on shared risks. One might argue that it is the actions of youth that will define the success or failure against the pandemic, and we will use this as leverage to demand equally swift and global action against our greatest risk: climate change.

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Hanna Alajõe, Estonia

To travel or not to travel? That is the question

Even though I am a strong believer in borderlessness, I see and feel the deterioration of mental health caused by the pandemic and I do not think national restrictions are enough to stop the virus. I am also a public health graduate and a believer in solidarity and equality. Even though we won't stop the virus until we manage to tackle this globally, we can't forget our individual responsibility.

A few months ago, I faced a question similar to many people around the world – should I travel to spend the holiday season with my family during the pandemic?

Whilst in terms of direct impact to public health, the disease has impacted the elderly the most, the life of youth has also been turned upside down. In today's global world we are used to borders being always open, especially if you are amongst the lucky ones living in the Schengen area, or even better, in the European Union where you can move abroad without having to request a visa and have almost all the rights of the local citizens there. Due to that, many of us have gotten used to living between two countries, having our lives split between the country of our family and cultural origins and the country of our current career ambitions or studies as an example.

One percent of all employed people in the EU live in one member state whilst working in another (European Commission, 2020). In some smaller countries, foreign students make up almost half of the student population. The Erasmus+ programme alone helped almost a million people to study, train or volunteer abroad within 2019 (European Commission, 2020). We, as young Europeans, have been raised with the mindset

of open borders and endless opportunities, many of us having travelled through 20 countries without ever having to apply for a visa. Even among young people who have not travelled through a mobility opportunity, such as Erasmus+, 73% can envisage living abroad (CHE Consult GmbH, 2016). COVID-19 has stopped all of that abruptly.

One might say that staying at home is the simplest thing we can do, that taking away the privileges of travelling and setting restrictions on socialising are nothing compared to the harm that getting infected can cause. Of course, nobody wants to get sick, but what are the impacts of the numerous restrictions set due to COVID-19 on our general well-being? According to research done in Estonia, youth is one of the age groups most susceptible to stress and tension caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Vaino, 2020). The suicide rate amongst children in Estonia has risen alarmingly amongst the last year, claiming 4 times as many victims as the year before (Vaino, 2020)! Teachers are noticing mental disorders, especially anxiety increasing and starting earlier, seeing signs already in kids as young as 10 years old (Pärli, 2021). Similarly, the symptoms of anxiety and depressive disorder have increased fourfold among adults, in addition to problems with sleeping, eating and alcohol and substance abuse due to the stress and worry over COVID-19 (Panchal et al., 2021). This data clearly shows that the pandemic's health impacts must be considered on all levels and not only by counting the direct cases of people infected. Restrictions are necessary to limit the spread of the disease, but the impact of the restrictions has to be taken into account.

I consider myself a citizen of Europe, a strong believer of unity of nations and against having borders that restrict movement. Seeing how Europeans live, crossing borders to do daily shopping, it doesn't make any sense to me that COVID-19 restrictions should be related to these administrative borders that lost most of their meaning years ago. So why were most of the countries so quick to close borders in times of COVID-19? Why would it be okay to travel from Vienna to Salzburg (distance 251.74km) but not from Vienna to Bratislava (distance 54.88km)? The virus does not know these borders that we have made for ourselves.

Even though Estonia had one of the strictest border-crossing policies during the first outbreak of COVID-19 last spring, we had cases of the virus then and we do now: at the current moment, Estonia is the second in Europe for most new COVID-19 cases per 100 000 people in the last two weeks (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2021). With our lives set up so internationally, the borders couldn't stay closed for long. Whilst one country got it under control – the others lost their grip and so COVID-19 stormed further in Europe and in the world. Even though we have set countless restrictions to stop the virus, burdening our social structures, mental health and economy in many ways, COVID-19 has not been stopped, because national or regional restrictions cannot stop a global virus. If the virus knows no borders, then the restrictions and vaccination goals we set should not either. A global pandemic requires global coordination and agreement.

I chose not to travel to the other side of Europe for holidays. For me, the risk of potentially infecting my loved ones or re-spreading the virus in an area that was already doing better was just too high. That said, it was my decision and every person looking at the same facts will come to their own right conclusion and decision. In the end, it is the same with COVID-19 as it is with climate change – when it comes to cross-border global issues, individual actions are only a small part of the equation.

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Aivar Kamal, Estonia

The invisible enemy: testing our strength

The COVID-19 pandemic has become not only a huge global problem for us, but also an opportunity to test the strength of the whole society and each of us. A pandemic can be compared to a war with an invisible enemy. It seems that there is no destruction of infrastructure, there is no interethnic tension, but everyday thousands of people die around the world, and we can never be sure that our closest relatives and friends will not become the next victims of this battle.

The most important challenge is to curb the spread of the virus, and each country has chosen its own way of solving the problem. Nevertheless, the main difficulty lies in the fact that the measures taken in different countries and the lack of a synchronous approach led to situations where in one country the level of infection can be critically high, and in another country it is low. Subsequently, all other countries begin to suffer, because solidarity assistance to each other is an integral part of international relations.

This is where the main problem of values lies: do we want to be a free society and not restrict the freedom of citizens, or will we use measures that are customary for countries with a totalitarian regime, restrict freedom of movement, and oblige to follow the rules? In the first case, we will need to come to terms with the high mortality rate, the impossibility of the health care system to help everyone, and therefore the state will violate its agreement with its citizens on their medical protection and doom hundreds of people to inevitable death. In the second case, the country will find itself in a difficult economic situation, thousands of people will lose their jobs, dozens of enterprises

will go bankrupt, and the country will face a long economic crisis. The outlook in both cases is not bright, therefore, in order to overcome the crisis as quickly as possible, we will need to reach an agreement between all countries around the world in order to cope with the global COVID-19 pandemic in the most mobile way. If all countries would simultaneously restrict the movement of all their residents within the country and between countries, set short-term restrictions on meetings and for a short period would restrict the function of places with a large crowd of people, then maybe we would have already forgotten the pandemic and be sure about our future. Nevertheless, this is only a utopia that cannot work in the modern world for many reasons.

That is why I am a supporter of a model of society where each country sets its own limits of restrictions but remembers about the vulnerable and those who may not agree with the position of the majority. In this case, it is important that everyone follows the established rules and understands the seriousness of the situation. It often happens that if the restrictions are too weak or poorly communicated to citizens, then the crisis turns into a sluggish chronic disease that cannot be cured. The state continues to suffer economically, socially, and politically. People have dissatisfaction and anger, they do not understand what they need to do in order to return to their previous life, and in the end, the vicious circle closes, and it is very difficult to get out of this abyss.

Of course, everyone manages his or her own life and everyone makes decisions about their health independently. However, as soon as the life of others depends on you, not paying attention to a

global problem and not thinking about others is not just unethical, it is a gross violation of norms and rules. That is why it is the duty of each of us to follow the established rules as clearly as possible. The task of government officials is to be as honest and open as possible with their citizens. Communication should be clear and understandable, there should be no room for doubt or misinterpretation of the situation. People should have confidence in how long their rights will be restricted. Countries must quickly coordinate with each other their response to the COVID-19, and the world must follow a single plan to overcome the crisis. Now is the time for those people who can make quick decisions by appealing to their people. I hope that we will overcome the resulting crisis very soon, but I am also a realist and I know that our path will be long and thorny. For my part, I will do everything possible to help our society, our country and the whole world. Let's all together overcome the global crisis and be a little kinder to each other!

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Lembe Kullamaa, Estonia

Let's flatten the (infodemic) curve!

"People in this country have had enough of experts" said the British politician Michael Gove in 2016 before the Brexit referendum. The British were urged to "take back control" (Staples, 2020). In October 2020, Donald Trump said to his supporters not to worry about COVID-19. Politico has summed up his main points "It's not that big of a deal, vaccines are on the way and if people get sick, most of them will survive it just as Trump and his family did." (Cook, 2020) In US, COVID-19 death toll at the time was above 215,000 people (Cook, 2020). These quotes are from two very different times, some might say. Yet they both are at the root of what we face today.

We are currently a year into a pandemic. We are also in the middle of an infodemic – a flood of information on the COVID-19 pandemic. (According to WHO "Infodemiology is the study of that information and how to manage it") (World Health Organisation, 2021). This is a part of the ongoing 'culture wars' especially visible in the Western countries. One might ask, what has this got to do with people getting tired of experts? Sadly, very much. Scepticism of experts (especially scientists) is nothing new. One of the most rememberable cases of this from the recent history is vaccine hesitancy arising from now debunked and retracted Lancet paper on MMR vaccines and autism by Andrew Wakefield et al. This has had far-reaching consequences and has caused the global MMR vaccination coverage to drop. In 2019, 71% of children had received two doses of measles-containing-vaccine. The WHO recommended coverage is 95% (World Health Organisation, 2021). Ben Goldacre, in his book **Bad Science**, has laid the greatest blame for the misinformation regarding the MMR hoax with the media, who should have

realised that Wakefield's paper provided no evidence of a link (Goldacre, 2008). He mentions the deficiency of scientific understanding among journalist, and the experts' and scientists' lack of knowledge on how to communicate their findings in a way that is understandable to the public.

This leads us to the year 2020: the pandemic. People are dubious of experts as their elected leaders have been urging them to be for years. I have previously mentioned only Gove and Trump, one might ask how is this relevant to the rest of the world. Like it or not, we live in a globalised society. Everything is connected thanks to the internet. Information moves quickly. And, as the late Sir Terry Pratchett has said, "A lie can run round the world before the truth has got its boots on." Meanwhile, people "do not believe" in the COVID-19 pandemic, and (not) wearing masks has changed from a public health question to a political statement. This has increased resentment and rifts in society. To illustrate, on one hand, people who are exempt from wearing masks (e.g., due to their health condition) still do it. On the other hand, some people say wearing a mask restricts their personal freedoms. I understand both. I do not have to wear a mask, because I have asthma. Yet I always do because I know that getting COVID-19 would not end well for me. But I also understand that people feel like they cannot control anything in their lives anymore. Choosing not to wear a mask is one thing they still can.

This brings us back to the infodemic. Much of the information regarding COVID-19 is spread on social media. It has no borders, like the pandemic. Everyone has become an epidemiologist or a virologist. Everyone is an

expert, and no one is. People have "taken back control". Fake news and misinformation spreads even faster because everyone and anyone can spread a lie, a fake 'fact'. Meanwhile, academics, scientists, experts have come under fire and received abuse and death threats (Aggarwal, 2021; Wood, 2021). It is probably, to some extent, caused by the mistrust instilled to them during the long period prior the pandemic.

This is the place where the YOUth must act now. We can all take small steps: think critically before sharing anything on social media, double-check facts, check the trustfulness of sources. Yet, what is, in my opinion, most important – teach all this to your friends, parents, grandparents. Talk to them about their fears and what they arise

from. They might be caused by easily debunked misinformation. Not all of us have learnt critical thinking, how to read (scientific) articles. This is the place where we can share our knowledge. We owe each other this as global citizens to lower levels of infodemic.

In the modern globalised world, information and misinformation moves fast. In order to reduce its effects, we must act now and put a stop to this infodemic.

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Lauri Heikkinen, Finland

People power: the key to beating COVID-19

With the COVID-19 pandemic still at full steam across the world, some countries are stockpiling more vaccines than they know what to do with whilst many others are facing dire shortages (BBC, 2021). Such discrepancies should prompt us all to think about the strength of our institutions and whether the human race is truly prepared to tackle the monumental challenges we will all be faced with over the coming decades.

Despite the World Health Organisation urgent call for action – 'if we do not address the current, urgent shortfall, the consequences could be catastrophic.' – vaccine nationalism has reared its head (World Health Organisation, 2021). In a rush to secure as many doses as possible and without knowing yet which vaccines would be effective, many wealthy countries put in orders far exceeding demand. To give an example, the United Kingdom secured 340 million doses, or five doses for each citizen (Khan, 2021).

As expected, this has led to concerns over whether lower-income countries can afford to vaccinate their populations. As it has been said ad nauseam, viruses do not respect borders and it is in their nature to mutate in order to find as many hosts as possible, which should be of interest to everyone. In short, the fewer people get vaccinated, the more likely it is that a mutation resistant to existing vaccines will surface, spread across the world and, in the worst of cases, send the entire world back to square one.

Given that many of us have experienced at first hand the negative effects of isolation on mental health, not to mention the economic impact of lockdown measures, it is doubtful that any

reasonable person would wish for that to happen (Abbott, 2021). The Golden Rule, perhaps the most well-known ethical tenet in history, encourages us to treat others as we would like to be treated. A noble principle to live by, no doubt. When it comes to the COVID-19 pandemic, however, we ought to realise that, even from a selfish standpoint, sharing vaccines is the right thing to do. Moral obligations aside, it makes economic sense: fewer outbreaks mean more efficient supply chains and increased economic output overall.

Since it is undoubtedly in the best interest of all for life to go on with minimal disruption, ensuring that vaccines are fairly distributed is a key step to take towards achieving that aim. In a world where everything is connected, we cannot afford to put a foot wrong.

Another cause for grave concern is the distinct lack of access to information among certain sections of the population, as evidenced by the spread of conspiracy theories regarding the vaccine. This shows that the promotion of a worldview based on science and the pursuit of evidence have failed. In a public health crisis such as this one, decisions must be guided by the best information available at any given time.

Therefore, we must demand that more be done. Our ability to respond to any crisis depends on us sharing a common reality. A reality in which there are no nanobots or microchips in vaccines (Department of Health and Aged Care, Australian Government, 2021), a master race of lizard people does not rule over the world (Paramore, 2021) and US presidential candidates do not run satanic child abuse rings out of New York pizza parlours (Nelson, 2020).

The fact that so many people would choose to entertain such outlandish theories speaks of a deep divide within our societies. In order to fulfil one's obligations as a responsible citizen, we must first feel that the social contract binding us all is of value. In this light, the fact that many of us feel so far removed from the world ought to make us all hang our heads in shame.

It is up to every last one of us, young and old, to call for societies people can feel part of, where the actions of those in power can be criticised without fear of reprisal and leaders engage in open dialogue with the citizenry who, in turn, have had enough opportunities to shape their lives in their own image and can trust those who represent them to have their interests at heart when making decisions.

Against this backdrop, it could be said that the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic is a reflection of the world at large. An inability to tackle injustice globally means none of us are, ultimately, safe from harm. This is precisely why people across the world have come together to demand action against climate change, income inequality and gender-based violence.

Change will, of course, not occur overnight. Even so, it is our duty to remind those who represent us that the eyes of the world are on them. It is important for each and every one of us to remember that we are all responsible for each other and that our actions have an impact on the lives of others. One should also bear in mind, however, that the unwillingness of some to hold up their end of the bargain has its roots in a divide deeper than we are perhaps prepared to acknowledge. Dismissing this deep societal malaise as sheer ignorance, no matter how attractive a proposition it may be to those of us who can afford to ignore it in our daily lives, is in the interest of no-one.

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Emilia Lakka, Finland

The need for intergenerational cooperation

The COVID-19 health emergency has disrupted life as we know it in nearly all professional fields and sectors of life. Whereas seniors are more likely to suffer from the disease severely and to recover slower, it has been the younger workers, women and those with the lowest disposable income that have been affected most by its adverse economic effects (BBC, 2020).

Whilst newsfeeds all over the globe have recently inflated with stories of young people ignoring public health considerations, the reality is much more multifaceted. It is crucial to remember the long-term consequences of the crisis for the employment opportunities, education and mental health of the younger generations. To combat intergenerational inequalities, youth must be actively included in the transition from short-term emergency measures to long-term recovery efforts (OECD, 2020).

During the pandemic, teenagers and young adults around the world have taken to the internet to, for instance, promote good hand-washing practices and to raise money to frontline medical workers. Empowered "young people [have learnt to] use digital spaces to develop their civic identities and express political stances in creative ways, claiming agency that may not be afforded to them in traditional civic spaces" (Pelter, 2021). Considering this, I would go so far as to contend that we, the global youth, are the key to navigating us all through the pandemic and building a road to a new post-COVID-19 era. We have the tools and knowledge to become the frontrunners of a new digital way of experiencing unity and solidarity that brings us all together in the middle of chaos and social detachment.

Young people are not only more resilient to the virus, but we are also often more equipped to assist older social-distancing family members and friends in everyday chores, such as grocery shopping and other necessary errands. Such roles are often overlooked as helping elders is in many cases seen as something that can be expected of every young person regardless of their personal capabilities and troubles. Whilst we must remember the range of different individual situations, such as disabilities or the young persons themselves belonging to an at-risk group, that may prevent one from taking on these responsibilities, our generation as a whole has taken on crucial tasks to hold our society together.

Within my own field of research, immigration studies, this can be seen especially when it comes to seasonal work. The COVID-19 crisis has brought to the forefront the crucial contribution of labour migrants, especially in the agricultural sector, in ensuring the continued functioning of the national and global food supply and resolving labour shortages in fields where there is a clear demand for additional workers. As seasonal workers are mainly healthy young adults, they are, in many cases, able to move more flexibly than their older countrymen (European Commission, 2020). In Europe, where we have in recent decades witnessed a large-scale rise in both right-wing populism and anti-immigrant sentiment, it is quite ironic that it is now young migrants that keep our food supply and economy running whilst many of us are at home in lockdown sitting in Zoom meetings in our sweatpants.

What are we doing as governments and co-citizens to thank foreign-born essential workers who not only work in agricultural jobs that are often rejected by local people who prefer better-paying, less draining and regular employment but also in other occupations in which face-to-face encounters are unavoidable? These include but are not limited to nursing COVID-19 patients, operating public transport and delivering food orders to distance working individuals. By working such jobs, many migrants expose themselves, out of necessity and a need to provide for their families, to situations where they are likely to catch the disease. And so, whilst certain xenophobic forces account the larger numbers of COVID-19 cases amongst immigrant communities to negligence and disregard toward public safety guidelines, their situation is instead a manifestation of the structural flaws in our labour markets that force some to take on employment opportunities that others overlook.

Pushed to face the facts, some European countries are now taking action to officially recognise the role of migrants in supporting their host societies. France, for example, has invited foreign citizens working in the COVID-19 frontline to apply for accelerated naturalisation (Kleine-Rueschkamp & Özgüzel, 2020). Whilst such ways of giving recognition are important not only to the individuals themselves but also from the perspective of conveying a larger scale message of acknowledgement and gratitude, they should not be necessary. If our national immigration systems had been more resilient in the first place, we would have bene able to adapt them more quickly in the face of a rapidly changing social and economic reality to ensure a smoother admission of foreign workers across borders even in the years of pandemic. The more simple and clear a system is, the more easily it can be modified to respond to emerging challenges.

To conclude, as a professional historian, I want to raise the issue of the intergenerational effects of the pandemic. Whilst the most crucial task of youth is to be present here and now and contribute to finding sustainable and just ways out of the COVID-19 pandemic, it must also be noted that some decades into the future we will also be the bearers of knowledge that will hopefully help future generations learn from and avoid the pitfalls of our present-day public health actions. Large international youth empowerment projects, such as ASEFYLS4 and online climate strikes (Taneja, 2020), show that we are ready to take responsibility, participate in the global debates on the future of our planet and launch projects that will lead the way towards a 'new normal'. Increasingly identifying as global citizens, we have all the tools to bring about lasting change, not only within our own borders but also on a wider international level.

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Otto Lilja, Finland

The skill of putting things into perspective

The pandemic has really challenged us as global citizens to think locally and reconsider our behaviour patterns more than ever. Hence, our individual responsibility has also increased, as we frequently share personal decisions through social media and inevitably influence others. In this op-ed, I discuss a solidarity approach for a pandemic. I discuss the importance of thinking locally whilst perceiving the bigger picture globally. Moreover, I discuss how a solution-oriented and positive approach also helps us keep ourselves safe whilst making our day-to-day life meaningful, despite the lack of something we call 'normal'.

On a personal level, I see the pandemic as an opportunity rather than a threat in the bigger picture. In Finland and the UK, the pandemic has provided an opportunity for people to step back, reflect, spiritualise and reconsider their personal values and eventually reboot. It has allowed us to explore our surroundings, reflect on our values in a more sustainable direction, explore a local way of living, reduce our consumption and really think about what is important – at least if you have been keen to see it in that way. On the other hand, whether negativity has taken the lead or not, the skills and personal experiences of coping with any crisis will be rather different. Whilst the pandemic has hit many of us hard on a personal and professional level, it has also provided us with a way to transform the working culture to a more flexible and human-led direction. However, whilst saying these things, I also need to acknowledge the privileged position we hold in the UK or Finland, as we have generous benefit systems and advanced medical resources to assist us.

In connection with the topics mentioned above, the most significant ethical obligation I am calling for is solidarity and the skill of putting things in perspective. Whereas we've been in lockdown in the UK for eight months of the year and have suffered significantly from one of the worst outbreaks of COVID-19 globally, I see people have still kept surprisingly positive when I'm analysing the tone in the public debate. Whereas in my motherland Finland the tone has been significantly more in the direction of complaining, although the society has been running rather normally most of the time. Any complaining sounds inconsiderate when we realise that we are still privileged compared with some regions in the global south where people are living in poverty, where the financial and medical support by governments is weaker, and where there is a lack of sanitation facilities, digital equipment, internet networks, social benefits, and overall infrastructure to cope with the pandemic.

What's positive? The pandemic has taught us to be more considerate towards our communities. On a personal level, one of the most ethical decisions you can make is to support your local businesses and services and choose domestic travel instead of overseas holidays. This not only helps your local community recover economically, but it is also an environmental option. At the beginning of the pandemic, I launched this personal travel term – 'micro-travelling' – where I aimed to explore my hometown of London as much as possible by discovering new neighbourhoods and nearby villages. This has been a lifeline for me in terms of mental health level and education, and it has given me the chance to specialise in the region where I am living. Moreover, in this way,

I'm giving my own contribution to economic recovery. At the same time, I try to promote this to my peers. Slow and local travelling has been a growing trend recently, and the pandemic has boosted this trend. So, why not take full advantage of it? I have made an international career over the past 6 years, travelling at least half the year. Before the outbreak, I spent 4 consecutive months travelling around Asia. Shifting to this new lifestyle has been eye-opening and, experience-wise, ultimately fruitful. If I can do this, we all can.

The pandemic is probably the most collective experience our youth have ever experienced, as pulling this together is the exit where the recovery begins. When it comes to vaccination, comparing the rules, restrictions and influence on others with one's own experience is the way to go. Thinking out of the box of your own needs, refraining yourself from organising an event or a trip to Dubai for example is necessary, because if we all only follow our own needs, there is no way out of the exit.

 The ability to think globally but act locally is more vital than ever before if we want to recover from the crisis sustainably. Critical thinking is necessary, but ignorance threatens the common good. At the end of the day, the most important approach is collective solidarity and thinking beyond our own needs. Citizens should call on the government for clear, fast decision-making and exit plans to better navigate this challenging climate. This way, we can keep ourselves motivated and positive as much as possible throughout these challenging times. Having clear structures also helps us to make better decisions and keep others safe.

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Audrey Hoffmann, France

Youth: drivers for 'two-way street' dialogues

15 months, 2,632,348 deaths, 118,723,132 cases (Statista, 2021; Worldometer, 2021) – these are the current COVID-19 figures and what they represent. The world has learnt the hard way that COVID-19 is egalitarian and universal. It affects all people regardless of their social background, country, age or gender. The measures taken to ensure the safety of citizens in the face of this pandemic have led states to restrict individual and collective freedoms in the name of the general interest. The confinements put in place in many countries have allowed everyone to reposition themselves and to become aware of their environment. They also reconsider the life they lead in a capitalist, liberal world in which the consumer society is omnipresent. COVID-19 has forced the world not to run away from its problems but to accept them by becoming aware of them. This awareness and the actions that follow must be accompanied by governments, especially since most of them originate in the new generation. The young people who are often criticised during COVID-19 for not respecting the rules applied by governments and the community. Young people are often put on the side-lines of society, not heard and even less listened to. Some sociologists have come to call them "the forgotten ones". Nevertheless, young people must continue to act, they must wake up and become essential actors, first at the local level and then at the global level. Looking at the past year, what has been the situation of young people, where have they been for a year? Is it fair to stigmatise them? What if youth were the missing element, the solution to the COVID-19 crisis?

The world today is interconnected and interdependent. It can therefore not act individually. The management of COVID-19 during the first months has shown us that each citizen of the world needs the others and their skills to move forward and get out of this crisis. Individuals are linked to each other, and even more so today with the new forms of communication and information of the Internet and social networks. Indeed, young people spend an average of more than three hours on social networks per day (franceinfo, 2020). Instagram, Twitter and Facebook have become key tools for global information and for young people to take a stand on issues that are important to them, such as ecology (Greta Thunberg), domestic violence and women's rights, human rights etc. Thus, the young generation has the ability to see the big picture but also to create a dialogue in which borders do not exist. It is therefore important to understand that youth have the tools to raise awareness of a whole population, a nation and even the world. COVID-19 is a global problem and so must be the response. The first response of young people is that of communication and dialogue at the international level in order to understand others and their difficulties. The aim is not only to find answers that combine empathy and rationality, but also to create movements that support and raise awareness of certain issues in order to provide international and community work.

Secondly, the social situation, through the lockdowns but also through the rejection that some have made of the contributions by youth, has intensified the generational divide. Some French politicians think that the state "sacrificed the youth to save the elders". The problem is not so much to know who sacrificed whom but rather to understand the importance of youth in society. In fact, youth is the link between generations and bring families together around

events (birthdays, graduations, weddings, etc.). Moreover, the young generation evolves with the objective of sharing and dialogue with humility in the idea of learning from others and progressing together. We find ourselves in a 'two-way street' dialogue and that is what is essential. From an economic point of view, we must not lose sight of the fact that it is the young people who financially support their elders (retirement system in France, community life in the principle of taking care of one's elders in certain Asian countries). Thus, setting aside young people and leaving them in a very precarious situation does not encourage solidarity. Moreover, in the case of France, many young people feel abandoned and isolated socially and financially. The three consecutive suicides (Kovacs, 2021) of students by defenestration in less than a week are a sad reminder of student distress. In this sense, the situation has shown that it is important to provide quality support to young people in order to give them confidence in themselves and in others. In order for young people to work in, with and for the community, it is important to train them in this and to show them that they are accepted. Denunciation by the party authorities, disapproving looks, or criticisms are counterproductive. A frank and honest discussion coupled with transparency of information is more effective. Sanctions can be used to set the framework, but they should

also be a last resort. The best thing is to involve young people in actions to participate in the post-COVID-19 world but also to help them get out of it. We need to show them that they still have the capacity to act and that they are not just the victims of a virus that stopped the world a year ago. In this way, young people will become aware of the issues at stake, of their environment, and will invest in creating links everywhere, all the time and with everyone.

The pandemic situation has shown us that the question is not whether we all owe something to each other, but rather to understand that we cannot do anything alone. Our strength lies in the group with values and principles such as solidarity, sharing, communication and transparency. There is a nice proverb that says, "the truth comes out of the mouths of children", so maybe it is time to listen to them.

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Pavlo Stergard, France

Reflections on a social contract for health 2.0

If there is one thing this crisis has taught us, it is that ethics, morality and social pressure were underlying central themes in the COVID-19 crisis. And despite the constant criticism it receives, the youth has proved, and is still proving at the time of writing, to be up to the task.

Ethics, the science of morality, is something extremely personal and subjective. Our ethics conceive of actions that would not be limited beyond a point that might offend others. The notion of ethics has been totally overturned by the appearance of the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has totally 'regulated' our ethics through a popular doxa: we must restrict our liberties to protect the most fragile in our society, our elders. This social contract for health 2.0, unanimously accepted by all populations across the globe, has had as its essence the preservation of the 'general interest'. It has been respected so far in its entirety despite its recurrent extensions that distort the very terms of the contract. But this contract highlights the disparities and, above all, a generational divide with our parents (or grandparents) who were able to benefit from infinite resources in an infinite world, leaving by their actions and their egoism the fruits – or rather the waste – of finite resources in an (almost) finite world. But nothing happens: when we want to express ourselves, we are the same endless statements, which often begin with 'In my time' (but isn't time linear?) and which are punctuated by tearful acrobatics 'my grandfather was in the war, that's a sacrificed generation!' Yes, but did you fight in the war? No, we didn't fight in the war and yes, I thank all those who fought courageously to defend their values. But the war takes other turns, and I think that trying to make one's voice heard is an action, a path that can sometimes resemble a fight that today resembles a Sisyphean fight. Our struggles do not diverge, there is no corporatism in what we say. The generational divide is a fact, young people have not been able to benefit from the same economic, social and environmental conditions as their elders. Nevertheless, it does not call and has never called for a generational struggle (it would be stupid to fight against a camp that we will join in a few decades) but rather for a struggle to speak up.

As we know, young people are struggling to mobilise, a paradox in the age of social networks? (No, but that's another subject). This low level of mobilisation and politicisation means that young people are now paying the heaviest price for the crisis of COVID-19. Unable to defend their interests and to promote spokespersons, they are now suffering in silence. Would the youth have accepted the terms of the social health contract if they had been aware of the terms of the contract? Hard to say. It would have been interesting not to be confronted with an asymmetry of information but rather with a symmetry of information. If we had been told that we would accept to spend one (or even two) years without work to protect ourselves from a disease that only affects us a little, would we have accepted? Maybe we would have. But if we had been told that we would pay the heaviest price and that on top of that we would find ourselves totally neglected by public authorities, that our dreams, desires and projects would be left in total darkness, would we have accepted? I don't think so.

Being a citizen of the world today seems to be nothing but a delusion. The crisis reminds us that we are above all citizens of our own

interests. When the Schengen countries decided to unilaterally close their borders, this definitively closed the fantasy of a flourishing multilateralism in which only world citizens would exist. Today, young people are suffering and suffering in silence. The weight they carry on their shoulders is far too great. It is imperative to find solutions so that we can restore social harmony in our societies. How can this be achieved? There are many solutions, but this is the subject of another discussion.

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Stephanie Veith, Germany

The rulebreakers: would you report?

Here in Germany, we have been in our second lockdown since the beginning of November, which means four months now. During that time, we had strict rules on how many people were allowed to meet and where. However, it started really early during the lockdown. There were parties with more than ten people held in our building's parking garage with a lot of alcohol. In my case, I didn't call the police and report them because I really believe in the vital role of each of us as global citizens. I really struggled with this decision. Reflecting on this situation, some questions need to be addressed here: Would it have been my duty to call the police? Furthermore, do we owe each other anything as global citizens? If so, what are the ethical obligations of the various stakeholders – in this case, Youth – to keep our societies healthy & safe during the pandemic? I will try to answer this question in the best possible way and reflect on why I decided not to report the 'rule breakers'.

In the last four months, every two to three weeks, the lockdown got extended. Families are desperately trying to balance their work-life-balance, often with the kids at home in need of home-schooling. Germany is not alone in this pandemic, and many people are experiencing the same situation in other countries around the world. Almost all people worldwide are struggling with this pandemic, and it is not only a local problem. Breitbart.com published an article from our neighbours Austria, where nearly two-thirds of Austrians believe that the economic consequences of the virus lockdowns and restrictions will be worse for people's lives than the virus itself (Tomlinson, 2021). Furthermore, the article cites the Austrian Gallup Institute that the countries' economic situation will destroy 41% more people than the year

before (Tomlinson, 2021). CNBC.com published an article in February 2021 talking about the COVID-19 restrictions and stated that Germany's GDP contracted by 5% in 2020, leaving a very black forecast for the current year 2021 (Ellyatt, 2021). Coming back to the question mentioned above and whether we owe each other anything as global citizens, I would definitely agree with that, looking at all the facts mentioned above. People around the world are struggling to save their pure existence and their families. We are all in the same boat, so we should start acting like it. CTVnews.ca interviewed COVID-19 survivors and found that a lot of the people struggle with mental health issues after being infected (Favaro et al., 2021). The World Health Organisation is constantly counting the confirmed cases around the world, and to date, there have been 116,363,935 affections and 2,587,225 deaths (World Health Organization, 2021). The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs – Social Inclusion (2021) published a row of policies regarding those people most affected by the virus and they report that especially Older People are at risk during this pandemic (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021). Furthermore, they say that "many governments have called on the youth to embrace the effort to protect themselves and the overall population. Youth are also in a position to help those who are most vulnerable and to aid in increasing public health social awareness campaigns among their communities. Thus, youth are critical to limiting the virus's spread and its impact on public health, society, and the economy at large" (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021). These statements are essential for understanding the youth's vital role within the pandemic and its future. Even though I believe in the global

task to get ‚back' to normality, I happened to be uncomfortable asking myself the above questions and, referring back to my story, my situation of reporting my neighbours and their garage parties. Just like Frances Mao described the exact same position of two women that didn't inform the parties in a nearby pub, I felt very insecure, and I didn't know what was going on as I feared that I would be blamed should anyone be arrested (Mao, 2020). Even though I felt the need for justice, I decided to let it be and hoped that someone else would report the people in the parking garage. After this short analysis, I have a question for you: How would you have reacted to my situation?

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Janik Weigel, Germany

Our compasses pointing in different directions

From a global COVID-19 fighting perspective, we can identify certain strategy setters, some followers, and some clear opposition. However, most of those are visible and acting on a national, or even regional level, rather than a global one. What would instead be needed to win against a global pandemic is unified, global leadership towards effective goals.

The compass is not pointing in the same direction for everyone, and how should it? For most people (and politicians) globally, it's the first major disturbance in their personal freedom in a recent lifetime, something never experienced before. Whilst preparedness for something like this should have been a clear strength of process-driven democratic states (since their extensive organisational set-ups could have come up with different scenario plans to execute beforehand), it instead proved to be handled more effectively by those states with a more authoritarian leadership style, simply because for those states it's easier to rule through, without lengthy approval processes.

However, looking closer at democracies, it shows that the vast difference in response strength comes from cultural differences, especially the dimension "individualism – collectivism" according to Hofstede: a core value of Western democracies in the EU and the US is the individual freedom that people enjoy in creating their own lives, whilst Asian states such as Korea and Japan showcased higher collective value within their societies (Alon et al., 2020). Correlating this axis with the total numbers of infections, it becomes obvious that these states were able to manage the response much better and faster – not only because of this factor, but

it is certainly a given factor in this cause-effect relationship – which I will explore further.

Do we owe each other anything as global citizens?

Being born within the current border system of states grants one's certain rights – different ones are there for different states. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights aimed to come up with some core rights that every single human being should have, one of those is access to healthcare. From this perspective, COVID-19 is mainly seen as a public health crisis, because the sudden overload of the healthcare systems globally leads to a step back in providing access to healthcare for everyone – also beyond COVID-19 response – especially the poorest. A public crisis puts the individual out of focus, which I do not agree with. Society is made up of individuals, each of whom has different motivations and fears, which did not first become apparent through the individual adherence to government-imposed restrictions, but "a person's true character is often revealed in time of crisis."

Coming back to the rights that one was granted upon birth – those also come with responsibilities. For example, the responsibilities to pay taxes, to participate in mandatory insurance schemes, or to serve a social or military service once. Being a liberal at heart and true believer in the individual as the most important driver in someone's development, sometimes I have a hard time to understand why I need to 'also participate' in, for example, health insurance when I could do better on my own. Still, when it comes to vaccinations, I firmly

believe that too much choice and freedom is not the right approach to fight this pandemic based on the scientific information that we have currently: people need to get immunised as fast as possible to prevent further mutations. This is to avoid making all measures taken so far useless and having to start from the beginning again. For everyone to get back to a normal life soon, we need to make efforts to vaccinate as many people as possible to reach the needed threshold in each country, which requires the willingness from everyone.

What are the ethical obligations of the various stakeholders – in this case YOUth – to keep our societies healthy & safe during the pandemic?

Being the least at-risk group, politicians are worrying that the youth will show limited understanding for the measures taken. In my experience in Germany, Norway, and Singapore, however, the opposite is true, especially at the beginning of the pandemic. Whilst the older generation was rather reluctant to accept the drastic changes to their lives, especially when it comes to visiting family, younger family members had to actively refuse to see their grandparents for example. This type of commitment was not for their (our) own good, but because we care about our family.

From a philosophical standpoint on morals, one could argue from different perspectives 'how to behave', but I want to highlight Rawls' principle. He asked the question of how people would organise society if their socio-economic status or skills they were born with were completely randomly allocated. People would then choose a more equal and caring society structure, especially for those worst-off. Having this is mind, the youth need to think about how they would feel if they were in the shoes of someone in their mid-80s or with a chronic disease. This is especially true for the minority of troublemakers who put their own rights above everything else as a large majority adheres to current restrictions that hit them arguably the hardest.

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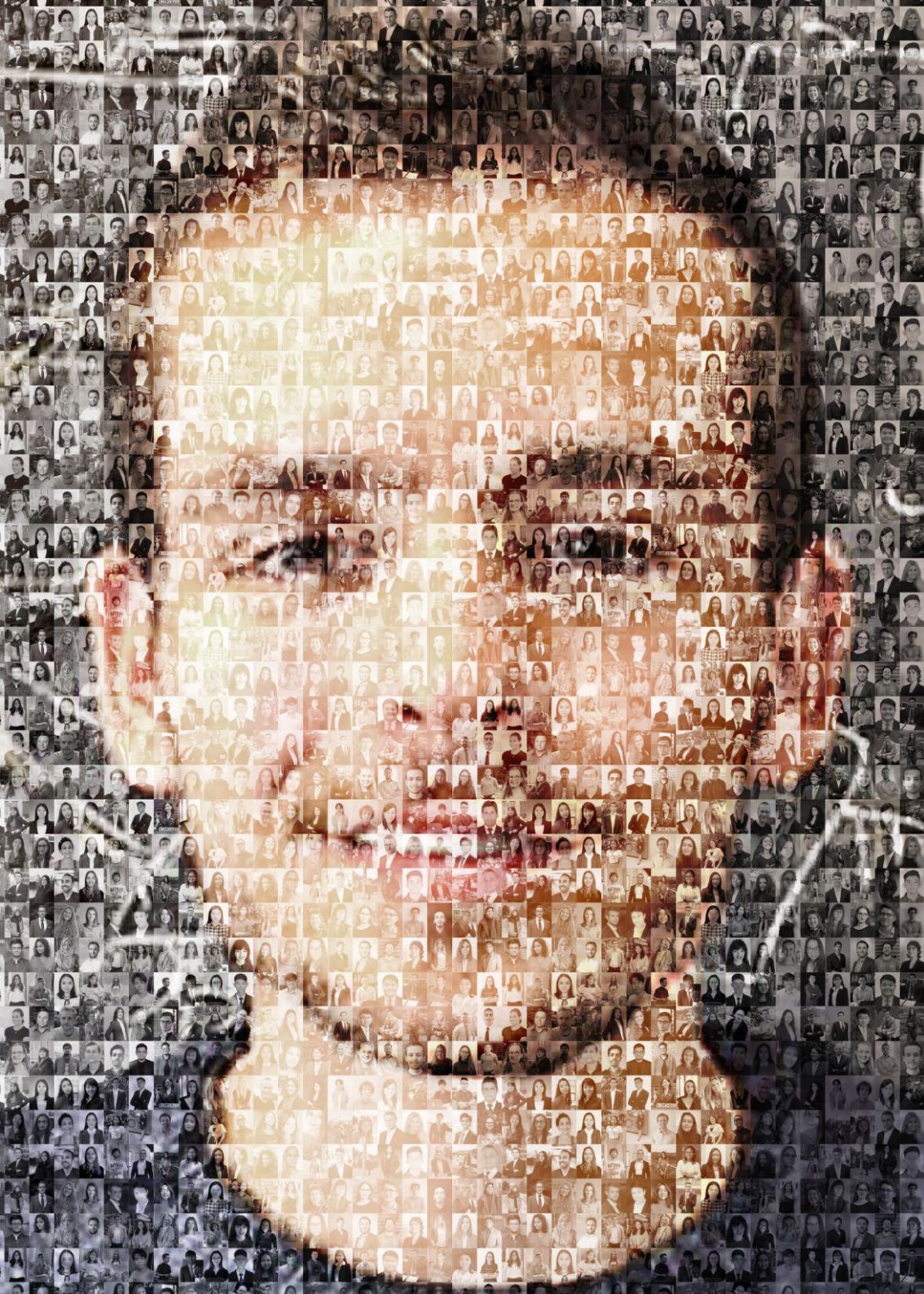
Ioannis Batas, Greece

Youth between individual and collective values

The COVID-19 outbreak made governments around the world adopt a number of measures to stop the transmission of the virus. The majority of the population sticks to these measures, but a minority openly resist them. Unfortunately, young people are often in the crosshairs with being accused of breaking the pandemic rules. Furthermore, persons between the ages of 18 and 29 years old may have less chances to be hospitalised or to die from the virus, but they still have been vastly affected by the pandemic measures. Young people need to prove that they are responsible, and able to actively participate in public discussions on the topic and take initiatives so that they lead us towards a healthy post-pandemic era.

Wearing a mask, social distancing, and limiting travelling are some of the most common measures that governments have imposed in one way or another. However, Asia has been praised for handling the pandemic better than the West (Cheung, 2020). In many Asian countries, the COVID-19 precautions have proved beneficial, and the majority of the population have followed them. In contrast, in several western countries they are not effective, and people aren't eager to stick to them anymore. There are two main reasons that can explain this phenomenon. The first one is that the measures were quickly and consistently applied in Asia, whilst there was a slow reaction and misinformation in Europe and USA (Cheung, 2020). The second one is the structure of society, which is tighter in the former and looser in the latter (Koh, 2020). In the West, many pandemic measures have been accused of restricting individual freedoms and being unrelated to prevent the pandemic (France24, 2020). This has

led to some citizens not complying with them or protesting against them.

Several cases have been reported in which young people have been accused of being the main culprits of transmitting the virus by either partying hard or just gathering in small groups. The younger generation, who is used to going out and meeting people, is fatigued by the prolonged lockdown periods. Whilst some young people have decided to break the rules as a result, that's not the case for the majority of them. For a year now, many young people have studied or worked from home and have limited social activities and travel. In order to protect their families, they don't go out or travel back home to reunite with them, and as a result, they isolate themselves.

Mental health issues have climbed, including a significant percentage of students that have experienced stress, depression, or even suicidal thoughts (Kwai & Peltier, 2021). To handle such issues, some people meditate, work out, connect with others online or take online therapy. However, that's not enough because the pandemic has been around for over a year. Some mental health advocates believe that a prolonged social distancing period will lead to serious physical and mental issues and urge governments to reopen universities.

Another major pandemic effect is the rising youth unemployment rate. Shops and restaurants, where young people are used to gathering, are closed in many countries. More than 200 million people worldwide have lost their full-time or part-time jobs or are in suspension (CTV News, 2021). Furthermore,

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recent graduates and young professionals who are seeking a job aren't able to find one. This situation not only makes the above mental health issues worse, but also leads millions of young people to poverty. Governments should take a couple of recovery measures in order to mitigate these effects, including the promotion of youth participation in the public sphere (OECD, 2020).

The younger generation has a great opportunity to acquire collective responsibility, be part of public discussions, and act in several ways to limit the pandemic effects. First and foremost, wearing a mask and keeping physical social distancing is an essential starting point. The value of this action is both individual and collective; only when each and every one of us shows care and solidarity will we build a fair and sustainable world. Secondly, young people need to open a discussion about threats and opportunities of the pandemic era; these discussions may happen either in small local groups, who keep social distancing, or in online meetings with peers around the globe. Last but not least, young people can either volunteer (e.g., by helping older and vulnerable people to pick up groceries and medicines) and donate as the UN recommends (United Nations Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, 2020) or come up with their own initiatives.

Pandemic precautions have proved more effective in Asia compared to the West due to the reaction time and the tighter structure of the society. Some people put the blame of the transmission on the younger generation, which is only true in specific cases. At the same time, youth unemployment and mental issues' rates are rising. It is a crucial time for young people to show responsibility by complying with the essential measures, discuss threats and opportunities, and act in multiple ways to overcome the effects of the pandemic. A responsible and collective approach from young people, like the one described above, can lead us to a brighter and healthier future.

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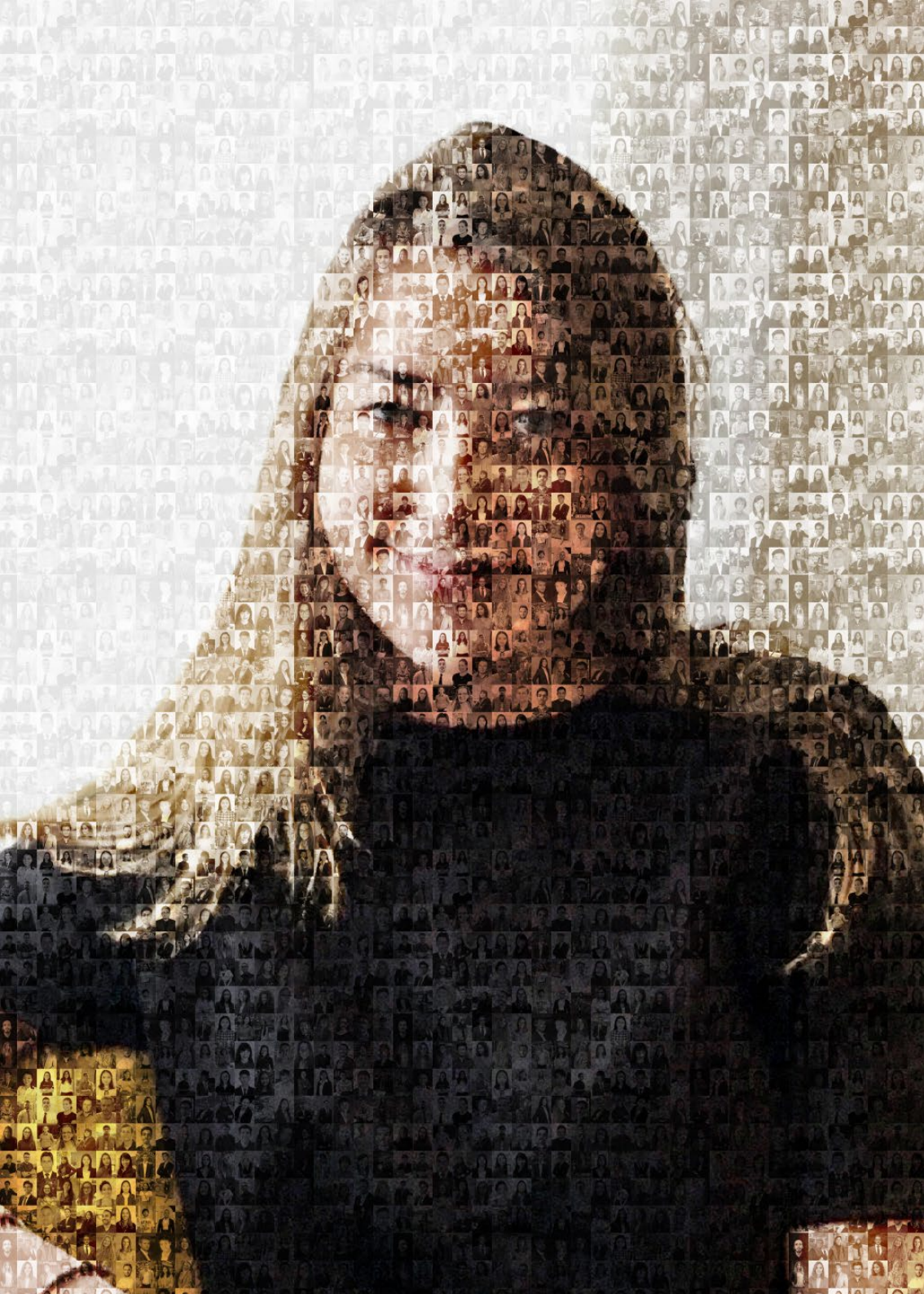
Victoria Datsi, Greece

Towards a new generation with no separation and no blame

When the number of COVID-19 cases began to rise again after the summer, young people were targeted. At the beginning of the second wave of the pandemic, most cases were mainly found in young people and not in the elderly, maybe because they went out more or maybe they did not keep safe distances. Of course, this criticism turned out to be the reproduction of a cliché: young people are too careless and will thus transmit the virus to the older population groups. In fact, the European governments have recently addressed a special appeal to young people to refrain from gathering and celebrations that are unnecessary.

Equally interesting is the changes that the pandemic has brought to the way of life of young people in Europe. The March 2020 lockdown forced the closure of many clubs, whilst other activities, such as sports or travel, were restricted. In short, the pandemic severely limited young people's choices to try new things and gain new experiences.

At first most teenagers were much more responsible as there was a fear of later fatigue and we had learnt to survive with the virus. However, I would say that the family environment and its influences play an important role on how their character is formed and the extent to which young people consider the risks of the pandemic situation. I believe that the new generation plays a major role in the spread of the pandemic as a significant percentage does not comply with all the rules. This results in the virus spreading to all ages, because, as we have seen, the virus does not discriminate. Young people often feel that they have the burden of proving to the world that they are better than what others owe us.

From what I have experienced in my country, and in Europe in general, the behaviour of young people is offensive as they have not understood the seriousness of the situation. Everyone has a burden of responsibility for what happens regardless of age, not just young people. Teenagers are considered by many to be dangerous in times of pandemic. This is because of the influences that occur in their lives, to go out with friends, to organise illegal parties or gatherings. The social circle of a young person is usually larger than other social groups. The need for socialisation is greater and more pressing. The younger generation must have responsibilities and take measures to protect themselves from the pandemic. It is necessary for everyone to take care of themselves and those around them, especially relatives, parents and the elderly.

It is clear that those more at-risk are the elderly and immunocompromised groups. So, another burden falls on young people in blaming for the over-transmission of the virus. If you do not go beyond what is stated in the government announcements for protection measures, no one will accuse you. On the contrary, you will be blamed if you do otherwise.

We need proper management of the situation and to follow instructions from health authorities with the hope that we will quickly return to our daily lives. In Greece, it has been a nightmare for young people for a year now. The country has taken very tough measures which have not yet been eased. The country's health system is at its limits and the cases are increasing. Young people are a population group who have been affected both mentally and professionally by rising unemployment. All this has created a

psychological revolution that young people want to highlight.

In summary, I think we, as young people, have a large part of responsibility in dealing with the virus. However, we do not treat the situation seriously and observe all protection measures. As a new generation, there will be no separation and no blame.

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Anna Porichi, Greece

YOUth: a motor for community change

In 2019, according to the UN, young people aged from 18 to 25 years old accounted for 1.2 billion persons and 16% of the global population (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019). That is an impressive number of people upon whom the future will be constructed. In Greece, a country of approximately 11 million people, there are about 1 million young persons from 18 to 25 years old. About one third of this age group are students in tertiary education. One would think that governmental decisions would consider this age group with care, given the fact that they are the future workforce: scientists, doctors, politicians, innovators. As portrayed by an extensive survey on student life during COVID-19, students globally are dissatisfied by their government's decision during the pandemic whilst the majority is satisfied with their universities' response (OECD, 2020). From first-hand experience, I know that youth in Greece are continuously portrayed by the media as irresponsible and careless 'party animals', whilst the government keeps asking youth to be present in the fight against COVID-19 and to act responsibly, consciously targeting them for their 'covid spreading habits' and perhaps unconsciously realising the role that youth have in the progression of a society. Is youth recognised for what it really is? As a motor for profound community change? Well, let me show you how it is not and how things could really be.

We, YOUth, are asked to give up our social life, our university classes, our sports, our hobbies involving anyone but ourselves. We are asked to completely isolate ourselves from our communities except for our families. They are, we are, the only adult group of the population that is asked to completely give up their lives – if

they are not working. Working youth that have maintained their employment status during the pandemic are closer to other groups since they are still social in their work environment. We cannot deny that all age groups have been severely affected by the pandemic, financially, socially, and therefore mentally, however youth have been hit the hardest because they are the most social group, and the pandemic requires us to be antisocial.

Youth suffer mentally in the pandemic because we cannot be ourselves, we cannot find our place in society by exploring it, we are treated by the government as a problem to be solved, we are improperly educated, our internships and clinical/laboratory practices are being put on hold.

But how have youth reacted when the pandemic hit our countries? Most of us were reasonable, obeying government policies from the first moment, wanting to protect our families and elders. We were the first to flood social media with 'stay home' messages given that we are 'power users' of internet & technology devices. We were also the first to correctly wear our masks and help others do the same (Aristovnik et al., 2020).

What did we ask in return? What is expected from any government in a healthcare crisis: actions to reinforce healthcare systems and hence justify our individual patience and sacrifices for the common good.

Was the Greek government reinforcing its hospitals and public transport all this time? Was it searching for a way to get students back to universities for their essential lab exercises that

could not be held online? Maybe. Did it succeed? No. And it still has not. As of today, universities in Greece have been closed for a whole year, only having opened for a couple of weeks in October for some universities with lab and clinical exercises. Remarkably, from my personal experience, students were role models at that time, using all hygienic measures required, along with their scared professors. However, many of the university staff were not, not even bothering with masks that were mandatory indoors. And they were not the only ones. You could see middle aged people everywhere, in public transport and shops, with wrongly worn masks or no masks at all. Even though the mask was not optional. And yet, youths were the ones to be victimised because they were less likely to get sick and more likely to spread the virus. A few months later, now that the mask is mandatory even on the streets and people are not tolerating unmasked individuals, youths are less mentioned. My point here is that even though young people were not provided aid to adapt, they adapted before everyone else. And at the same time, they require change. Currently in Greece, university students are repeatedly on strikes for their right to return to universities.

We know that youth tend to follow trends and to reject them as quickly as they adopt them. They are motivated to take action and they are visionaries. We should be recognised as such and be given initiatives that could help us make a change, alongside more experienced individuals. In the case of Greece, the government has repeatedly ignored the feedback from the youth, even more so from students and teaching staff. We know that we have an eye for change. We are a motor for change, but we need to be heard first.

As it has been recently proven by the climate change action, youth know how to communicate and get organised at the global level, having been raised in the global environment of the internet. They recognise pressing issues, and they are not afraid to act.

YOUth should be recognised as a motor, a motor that you trust to work all the way to the end of the trip if you keep it well oiled.

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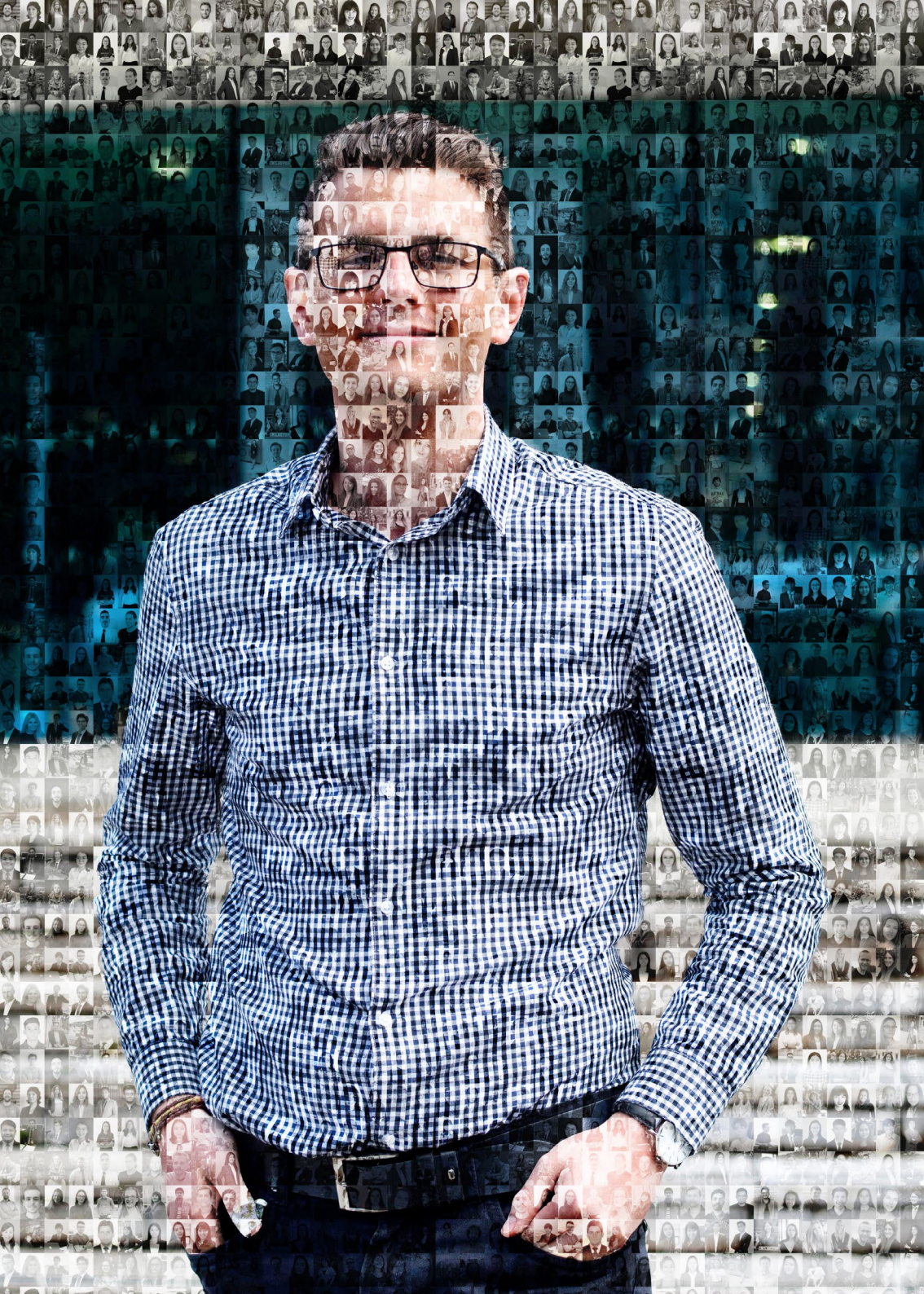
Ákos Baumgartner, Hungary

Embracing strategic co-operation for less stormy seas

Globalisation has brought us closer than ever before, and we cannot state that 'your concern is not mine'. We are in this together, but only strategic co-operation can calibrate our compasses towards less stormy seas.

During the first wave of the pandemic, citizens have experienced something marvellous: the strength of the community. After having gone into lockdowns and just accommodated to home office and home-schooling, grassroots initiatives have given societies the hope that together we would make it. Hosts of empty Airbnbs offered their places for healthcare workers. Residents have given applause for people working night and day in the frontlines to stop the pandemic. And then we booked our summer holidays. Business as usual.

The COVID-19 pandemic will probably be the crisis that fundamentally determines our generation's collective memory: we are in this together. Now, the sea is stormier than ever before, but we are trying to get to less stormy seas in our own individual boats. The unity and co-operation, the society-wide solidarity we experienced a year ago are still lying on sandy beaches where we went to get some rest after the fatigue.

The pandemic knows no borders but affects humanity disproportionately and highlights the global inequalities among gender, race, age, social status, place of living, occupation, income, etc. It also puts into focus how different our senses of social responsibility are: whilst the gap is widening among social strata vertically, a horizontal gap further polarises our global community, namely, what we are brave to do. Or to put it differently, to what extent we put others at risk with our own individualistic needs and entitlements.

However, especially in Europe, societies have found their partners in crime. To blow off steam – and to save collapsing sectors without any doubt – local and national governments, organisations were brave to believe that going back to unsustainable mass-tourism schemes of the pre-pandemic era would not put the global society at risk of whose price is to be paid now with the second and third waves. Inconsistencies with border restrictions and entry requirements have shaken achievements such as Schengen from one day to the other parallel to paving the way for loopholes. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen probably did not expect that her 'Smart solutions' proposal to revitalise European tourism would be truly smart with the rising numbers of 'dental holidays' to the Canary Islands.

To calibrate our compasses that navigate us out from the storm, there are three lessons to be learnt: coherent strategy, collective responsibility, and co-operation. Countries that can keep the pandemic under control, such as New Zealand, Viet Nam, or Thailand followed coherent and transparent strategies, where rules were not changed ad hoc and in favour of appeasement. The goal was to overcome the pandemic. Coherent and transparent strategies have led these countries and all resources were aligned towards the goal. What political systems those countries have or whether they are remote island countries or not, turned out to be irrelevant. Coherence and transparency give societal trust in the common project and a sense of being in this together.

Collective responsibility is something that societies of countries that cannot keep the pandemic under control have lost in the quarantine fatigue. The more people find their smart ways and tailored loopholes to get an exemption from certain COVID-19-related measures – let it be travel restrictions or escaping from curfew rules – the keener others will be on finding new, even smarter ways to fool everyone working on the frontlines. Collective responsibility is the extension of individual responsibility and follows the logic of insurances: when my insurance does not cover accidents that I would suffer in fun parks during a ski holiday, I avoid the fun park. When I know that putting others at risk with irresponsible actions, I know that I might be rejected from being sent to the emergency room when hospitals are overwhelmed or have already reached their maximum capacity, therefore, I do not put anyone at risk. Neither others nor myself.

Third, co-operation. Co-operation helps to overcome the collective action problem. Global problems need global, collective, cooperative responses from the global community. Co-operation enhances trust and leads to a more sustainable future. We have also seen at the dawn of the first wave how amazing co-operation was possible when grassroots initiatives guided our boats on the sea. Developing the vaccine so fast could have not been achieved without an unprecedented level of global co-operation, spiced with healthy competition. Global crises, let them be climate or health, cannot be tackled without global co-operation.

Fortunately, we are in a very good position to take these thoughts. If there is willingness and dedication to accept failures and learn to overcome them, societies, countries, and organisations of the ASEM family can share their best practices with each other. Strategic multilateral co-operation together with collective responsibility benefits the global community as a whole. The divide between your and my concerns has ceased to exist. We are interdependent which, with all its threats, boosts our ability to have one compass with a calibrated needle that leads our boats out of the storm.

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Virág Kemecsei, Hungary

Our shared responsibility as global citizens

It has been almost exactly one year since our life as we previously knew it has been transformed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our everyday routines and the way we organise our social interactions have been adapted to combat the spread of the virus. Issues connected to inequity have surfaced, and more and more often the following questions are asked: is it our personal responsibility or is it a collective responsibility to handle the pandemic and its consequences? What is responsible action in such a situation?

Let me start with the obvious: as human beings, we live in a society in which we have a responsibility towards each other in order to achieve progress and safety. We have accepted the social norms and rules which bind us in order to enjoy the benefits of social interactions. One of the major examples of such transactions is healthcare: if we fall ill, it is expected that we are able to seek help in exchange for fulfilling our own roles, at least in a well-functioning society. In the age of the internet and global interconnectedness, I would argue that this society has grown larger and wider than ever before, and personal actions have consequences for people across the world. For example, our local consumption of certain harmful materials can affect global environmental patterns.

In line with the Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), the transactional result of our global citizenship ideally should be equal access to healthcare and preparedness for global pandemics in the future – but in my opinion this can be realised only if we act in a responsible and well-informed manner as part of a global community.

Throughout this op-ed, I will reflect on my own experience and the narratives which have shaped the environment I was living in to support the above point. I remember that the news of closures reached me almost exactly one year ago to this day. I was sitting in my office in Budapest, and our Head of Unit suddenly announced that from Monday we would have to work from home until further notice. I also distinctly recall him saying "protect yourself to protect others".

From the beginning, the prevalent narrative coming from our governments and international organisations has been that 'we each need to do our part' to slow down and eventually eliminate the pandemic, regardless of which country we hail from. However, as the months dragged on, the economic consequences have become more and more severe, especially for those who have less resources and economic advantages. The narrative of 'acting in our individual interests and freedom' has come to be the counterpoint of a more collectivist action, according to which each person is responsible for their own health and thus a higher authority should not be allowed to infringe on their personal freedom.

This dichotomy and other factors have given birth to adversity to governmental measures, debates about the decision to not wear a mask and the right to travel, as well as conspiracy theories. The pandemic has been used as a political tool, whilst all of us have become fatigued by the constant closures, curfews and misinformation.

The way I interpret the 'individual responsibility' approach in general terms is that civil liberties and human rights offer the protection of

freedoms as far as exercising your freedom does not infringe upon the freedoms of any other members of society. If your action (i.e., not wearing a mask, travelling without due cause) inadvertently endangers others within the communities you interact with, you should be held accountable.

If we follow this logic, as global citizens we owe each other a preventive, responsible mindset that respects the health and safety of any other person we come across. If we all assume 'collective responsibility', we can expect the same courtesy of any other person we meet if we operate based on the reciprocal rules of society.

Assuming this mindset can take many forms in practice, depending on which social group we are coming from. As we young people are less susceptible to the virus, in Hungary I have seen many initiatives unfold that targeted helping the elderly: for example, doing the shopping for them when they were afraid to go out on their own. Today's youth is also more equipped to combat misinformation thanks to our technical skills, therefore I used this opportunity to teach my parents and older relatives how to fact-check information and how to use certain tools in order to work online.

Many grassroots online support groups have emerged on Facebook which helped me and many of my peers combat the detrimental effects of the situation on our mental wellbeing. After all, the other component of SDG3, mental health, is less talked about as a lasting consequence of the year-long pandemic, and I was happy to see that some of the projects of the ASEFYLS4 are directly addressing this issue as well.

As my closing thought, I would emphasise that we can overcome this challenge only if we act in unity, and more can be achieved towards SDG3 if we maintain this consensus and sense of responsibility as a global society. At least, that is my hope for the future.

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Prakriti Sharma, India

We know how to act as a global community, don't we?

The COVID-19 pandemic observes no geographical borders, making a response along the same lines essential for the entire world. Never before has this generation had a collective experience of this magnitude binding us together in the face of this crisis and putting a stark focus on our positions and, more importantly, our responsibilities and roles as global citizens. An accurate picture of an individual, they say, is only revealed in an emergency, so what have we revealed?

We have revealed that we do not actually know how to act as a global community. COVID-19 has painfully taught us that a pandemic anywhere is a pandemic everywhere and cannot be tackled independently. In the event of a global crisis, the first and most important line of defence is our global co-operation. This idea has been significantly eroded by the challenges posed by the pandemic, and our global response resulting in severe delays, struggles over resources, and significant economic impact, resulting in a rise of xenophobic sentiments and conservative ideologies all over the world. Thus, shortcomings in international co-operation highlighted by the current pandemic should serve as indicators for where to deepen our commitments to our collective, global development.

The pandemic functioned as a catalyst for the pre-existing, both obvious and hidden, inequalities of our society. From access to resources to racial bias, COVID-19 has made these inequalities a question of survival. For example, India does not recognise sex workers, a profession heavily affected by COVID-19, as legal employees. They do not benefit from any unemployment relief or support. The most obvious inequality revealed was access to quality healthcare. "There is ample evidence that social factors including education, employment status, income level, gender, and ethnicity have a marked influence on how healthy a person is" (WHO). This makes the risk and likelihood of negative health outcomes more likely for individuals from minority and low-income groups. For instance, in my area hospitals were charging premium rates for even non-COVID-19-related services. This follows standard economic thinking: less supply and more demand implies a rise in prices, a formula that does not consider social realities such as COVID-19. A significant force that has tried to manage this disparity is social activism. Whilst the situation has widened the gap, forces are working hard to manage it. This last year saw a huge amount of social entrepreneurship businesses and platforms begin, with many individuals volunteering their skills, time, and money to help make a difference. For example, I am a volunteer with a free mental health helpline that was created to help during the pandemic. Additionally, global attention, both politically and socially, on these inequalities saw a resurgence as the pandemic has forced a refocus on these issues.

We have also shown that we are very protective of what we consider our rights. Any limitation to our rights, such as the COVID-19 measures, is perceived as a dangerous threat to our independent autonomy. We feel a contrast between these measures and our freedom and all the hostility that comes with it. I have observed this in my community where COVID-19 measures are often viewed as 'too restrictive' or 'overly paranoid'. But why should our rights as individuals and our responsibilities as global citizens be perceived as two ends of a spectrum? This contrast has existed in our daily

lives pre-pandemic as well, but it has never had deadly consequences. The interdependence of rights and responsibilities is accounted for within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and exists to protect and balance one another. The recognition of both dimensions is essential when limiting the negative impact of the pandemic. International health organisations have made it clear that the pandemic cannot be conquered without co-operation on an individual level, making this a crucial dichotomy to resolve.

One resolution to this lies in a shift of perspective from these ideas to one that is guided by promoting the ideas of generosity and kindness. For example, viewing actions such as wearing a mask as exercising our rights to be good people, to ourselves and our community, rather than compromising for others. Our freedom is no more threatened by limitations, and we willingly respect the restrictions and the recommendations, rather than being told externally to do so.

Pier Aldo Rovatti summed it up in the title of his essay "When the I becomes us" where lies the resolution to these reflections (Rovatti, 1968). These positive ideas have always been present, perhaps less visible and exercised than the negative ones, and simply have to be given the space to be used again. They also form the foundation of thought that will help us respond and resolve these social inequalities.

The pandemic can be viewed as both a lesson and an opportunity. A lesson in what we have been doing wrong so far and an opportunity to do better. We saw the inadequacy of our global co-operation, an aggravation of our inequalities, and our own inner conflicts. A better post-pandemic world is possible but will only happen with global co-operation and the commitment from both institutions and individuals. It is very unlikely that this is the last global crisis we will face, so we can be certain that we will have another chance to do better. The wave of change that formed as a response to the pandemic has to be encouraged and nurtured to evolve into long-term resolutions.

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Prakriti Sharma

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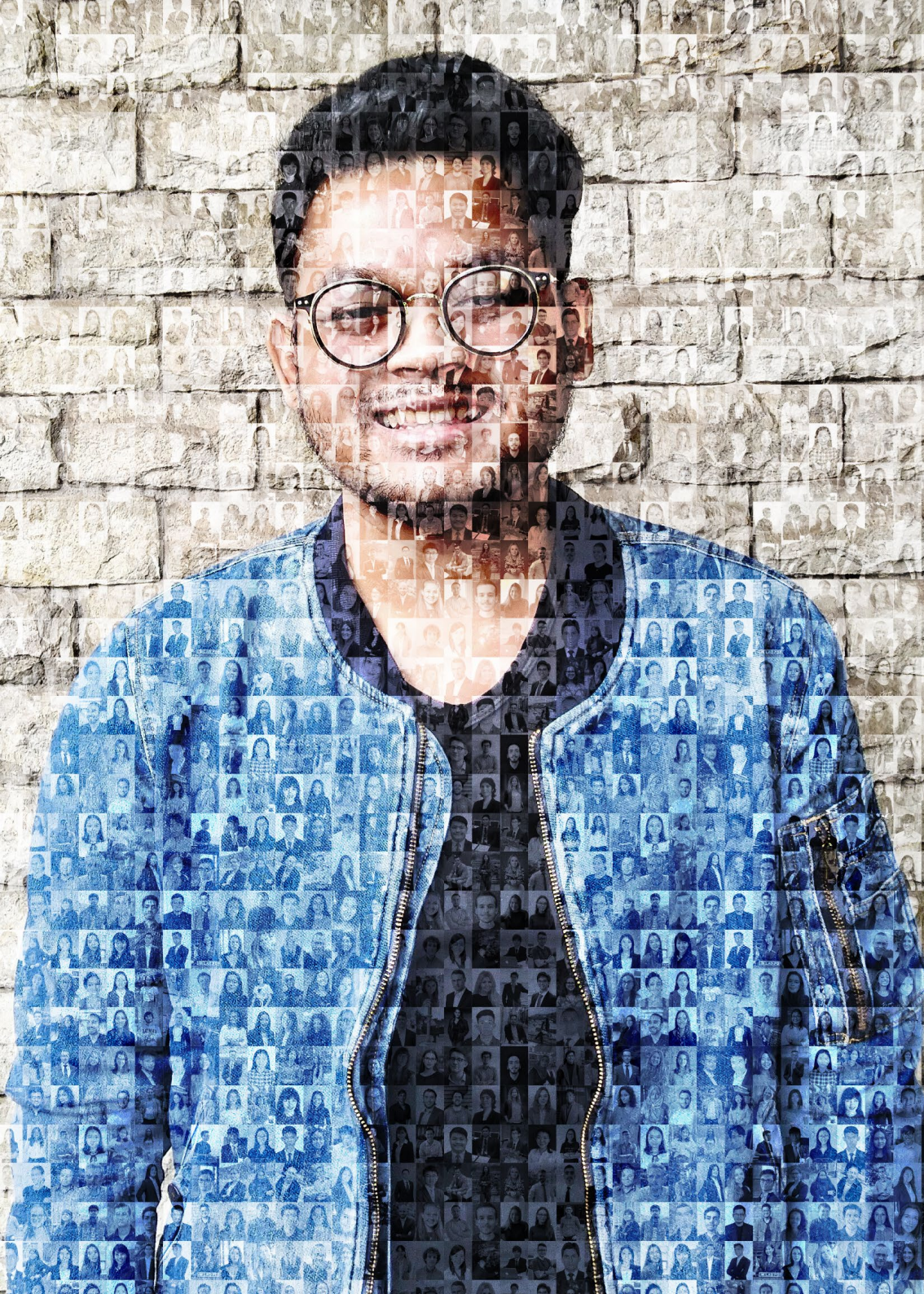
Alvin Adityo, Indonesia

No more online hoaxes: we don't need another COVID-19 battleground

COVID-19 did not come without any warning. Once the first case of COVID-19 was found in Wuhan back in 2019, China's neighbouring countries like Korea and Japan adopted mitigation actions to stop the virus spreading. As people are becoming more aware of the global situation thanks to the media and Internet, Indonesian people were pressing and questioning the government on what they have done to prevent COVID-19 entering the country. Unfortunately, the government's response was ambiguous and somehow neglected the fact that the virus may spread to the country (Mulyanto & Firdaus, 2020). As the government failed to satisfy the people and give sufficient information on what was happening, people were relying fully on the internet to find information about the virus, and this is where a new problem started. On the internet, people have found a variety of information which explains the nature of the virus starting from its early development, how it spreads and affects the body/host. Whilst it is good to a certain extent, information on the internet has no boundaries. People who have no skills in critical thinking and news analysis, misinterpret the information and share it across social media platforms, which has led to another disaster.

Therefore, before the pandemic hit the country, I have seen so many people who have disseminated conspiracy theories and hoaxes about COVID-19, racial discriminations towards certain communities – in this case Chinese minority in Indonesia – whom Indonesians thought as the culprit of this catastrophe and made untested traditional medications to counter the effects of COVID-19. This tragedy was the outcome of the government's lack of presence and communication. After the government failed to present itself to the public, the people's trust in the government decreased (Noor et al., 2020).

All these events are creating some sort of chain reaction which badly impact the present situation, starting from the lack of public compliance to government's policy until the collapse of public health services.

The first case of COVID-19 and the collapse of the public health services in Indonesia

On 2 March 2020, the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed by the President and the Ministry of Health. Two weeks after, the government decided a massive social restriction in the capital city where the first cases of COVID-19 were found.

Nevertheless, there were low-middle income communities who had no choice but to go to work, and small businesses operating behind closed doors. As the government's financial aid came in late, these people were not to blame. They did it because they have a family to feed and needed to survive. Despite the vulnerability, the fear of losing daily income is far greater than being exposed to the virus.

Since all restriction regulations or any policy related to the COVID-19 pandemic mitigation fell on deaf ears, the COVID-19 cases continue to rise. Public health facilities and staff are collapsing as they are overwhelmed by the continuous increase of positive cases. We have experienced a disaster where patients were literally dying to get medical attention, where there were not enough beds in the hospital and patients had to wait for hours to get treatment,

and medical staff were dying whilst treating patients.

In May 2020, medical staff across the country expressed their disappointment in the government through Twitter and Instagram by posting videos with the hashtag #IndonesiaTerserah ('Indonesia Whatever'). They criticised the government who put economic concerns over health concerns during the pandemic. First, they criticised the massive restrictions which they deemed as ineffective and urged the government to issue a stricter policy. Second, the medical workers asked the government to provide more personal protective equipment (PPE). In some videos, we could see that the medical staff were treating the patients while using plastic raincoats as PPE. Lastly, they urged the government to put aside economic interest and prioritise the health of its citizens.

There was quite a significant number of positive reactions by the public after these videos were released. The people decided to rally with the medical staff and urged the government to act as requested. At the same time, many textile and convection business owners decided to make PPE and donate them to local hospitals. Some influencers and organisations initiated online charity events to help the most impacted communities. The online movement somehow became a trigger towards a more sympathetic society, which reminds us that to become healthy and free from COVID-19, we need to make sure that no one is left behind.

Let's put everyone in the same ship and sail pass this storm: Youth in Action

"We are all in this together and make sure no one is left behind"

At least that is what we need to cling onto if we want to free from COVID-19. Individual health is temporary. However, if one person is healthy but their community is sick, they will eventually get sick one day. To keep ourselves healthy, we need to create an environment where people around us and the vast community are healthy.

After the online protests, some youth-led organisations decided to help the vulnerable community, low-income workers who still had to go to office and people who got laid-off, by providing food and groceries. Some youths were also involved in volunteer activities in the public health sector, for instance by becoming ambulance drivers and helping the medical staffs to do test & tracing (Fauzi, 2020). The country experienced a massive increase in the test & tracing programme from 1,000 tests per day in the middle of 2020 to more than 10,000 tests per day by the end of 2020. To further increase the testing capacity, Indonesian young scholars have invented a machine called GeNose-19 that could identify an infected person only based on their breath. The invention gained national recognition and was used in several public places. Furthermore, youth have also involved in the vaccination test programme to convince the wider community that vaccine is safe and works. On the internet, youth have been active in reporting hoaxes circulating about COVID-19.

Lessons Learnt from COVID-19

Overall, the internet has become the battleground where good and bad news contradict one another. Nonetheless, the internet is the most effective way to disseminate information from government to the public and the public to express their voice and criticise the government.

As the vaccination programme has commenced, the government needs to adopt a strategic communication to better communicate the goal of vaccination to the people. It may be an odd sentence to say, but looking at the context, the government needs to co-operate with young and influential people on the internet (charismatic community leaders, activists, and influencers) to promote the vaccination programme to public who seem to have lost interest with the government agenda.

Apart from planning strategic communication, Indonesia also needs to collaborate with

other countries in reconstructing the public health system. It is time for a comprehensive partnership agreement to focus on providing quality health facilities. Now, we realised that health concerns are as important as economic and politic concerns. Without good health facilities, no country could strive towards the path of recovery.

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Amelinda Agus, Indonesia

Teamwork makes the dream work

A year since the COVID-19 pandemic began, we have made drastic changes to our lives. With countries going into lockdown, schools moving to online classes, and work being done from home, we were forced to change our lifestyles in such a short time. However, looking back at the worst times of the crisis, there are some important takeaways that we can learn:

Teamwork makes the dream work

The COVID-19 pandemic has widened the inequality gap between the rich and poor. During the crisis, the rich were able to keep their lives afloat, whilst millions of people were lacking basic health services, education, and work opportunities. Those with money and power around the globe were getting tested fast and being treated well, whilst millions were facing the crisis without money or access to healthcare services.

The world would stand a better chance of overcoming the crisis by working together as a team. If countries share their resources, we might stand a better chance of winning the battle against COVID-19. A great example for this would be how EU states are working together to beat the virus. As COVID-19 spreads all over the world, the EU states have been among the first to realise that they can overcome the crisis better by collaborating with each other. The EU states are sharing their resources with each other, even to the extent of transporting critically ill patients from one EU state to another. By sharing their resources, they were able to provide the best care for their people and save many lives.

The crisis has also highlighted the tension between individual rights and collective responsibility. When millions of lives are at stake, the call to balance individual rights and collective responsibility becomes more urgent. It might seem like a hard work balancing these two notions, but we can make it simpler by putting it like this: we need to put more emphasis on the responsibility of all actors to take actions to make sure that rights are enjoyed.

All safety measures that were forced by the government would not have been effective if individuals had not done their part – such as washing their hands and staying home. In that scenario, the crisis would be unavoidable. That's why we need to focus more on our responsibilities in order to make sure that our rights will be fulfilled later on. We have to understand that whilst we have a right to freedom of movement, we also have a responsibility not to travel during this hard time. If everyone understands one's own responsibilities, we can make better progress in mitigating the damages from COVID-19.

Let youth participate

As the world slowly recovers from the COVID-19 crisis, countries need to cook up a strategic plan that can help us get back to our old lives. Youth should also take part in helping the authorities and use their power to contribute to the communities. Not only do youth make up a large portion of the global population, we are also a driving factor for many social movements and innovations. As changemakers, youths should play a critical role in ensuring that social agendas are resilient to advance the recovery from the pandemic.

As a youth myself, I believe that youths should take a chance to participate in various recovery actions. Being digital natives, we are at the centre of the most powerful communication tools in human history – social media. Therefore, we possess the responsibility to use those platforms to call for equal access to healthcare, education, and work opportunities around the world. We also have to use social media as a tool to hold our leaders accountable to higher standards and protect everyone in the society.

Youths are expected to leverage their mobilisation to overcome the COVID-19 crises through digital platforms to build resilience in our societies against future shocks or other global crises. Youths can use social media as an effective tool to empower communities, especially our peers who are terribly affected by the pandemic, by sharing information, advice, or even encouraging words. This way, we can help to make sure that no one is left behind and create recovery measures that are fair for everyone. Being tech-savvy individuals, youths are also able to play a crucial role in connecting diverse communities and cultures, gathering the voice of all people, and share their thoughts in inclusive ways to foster greater understanding. This will greatly contribute to a transformative framework for global development in the post-COVID-19 world.

Technology has been a great enabler for our societies during the pandemic. It has been used in various areas – such as remote work, online classes, and entertainment. Even when the pandemic ends, there will be an increased dependency on technologies in our daily lives. This should push us to use digital platforms in the recovery process from COVID-19.

Lastly, youths understand the struggle of joining online classes and how we are unable to receive the same quality of education virtually, especially for practical degrees like science and engineering. Hence, we are expected to give feedback about how the education system should be improved in the future – taking into account that there might still be a high demand for online school after the pandemic is over.

Whilst everyone is shouldering the long-term consequences of the pandemic, youths can help alleviate some of the pain by creating recovery efforts on social media platforms that particularly target their peers and minority groups. They can also take part in ensuring that government agendas are based on public interest. To my fellow youth, let's amplify the use of technology to push for equitable healthcare, education, and work opportunities around the world!

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Amelinda is working towards a Bachelor's degree in Business Economics at the Tokyo International University with a focus on Business Development. Amelinda co-founded an EdTech start-up and currently runs a youth-led organisation that aims to raise financial literacy in Indonesia. She also takes part in various student-led clubs such as TED and Hult Prize.

Joni Hendrick, Ireland

A world upside down

Like most people, my life since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic has been a tumultuous one. If like me, you live in Ireland, then the last year has been one of constant change and uncertainty. It feels as though when one lockdown ends, another one begins before I even have time to process the last one. This constant change in restrictions and the feeling like there is no end in sight has been detrimental to the mental health and well-being of everyone. However, whilst there are days where I wake up and feel like I cannot take the isolation and restrictions any longer and I just want to call all my friends and meet everyone I know, three things have always been certain: wear a mask, wash your hands, and social distance. Whilst this has been the norm for most people this past year, unfortunately, there are still thousands of people who believe that COVID-19 is not real and refuse to follow those three simple rules. Every day, I wake up to see more and more news articles about a college party that saw hundreds of attendees, an anti-lockdown protest that turned violent, or a person being removed from a store for refusing to wear a mask. Since the beginning of the pandemic, many people have argued that it is their right not to wear a mask or follow the restrictions, but is it?

We are all global citizens. No matter your race, ethnicity, age, or gender, etc., every one of us is a global citizen, and with that comes responsibilities. Israel (2015) argues that global citizens have a "responsibility to understand the major global issues that affect their lives". It is fair to say that the COVID-19 pandemic is a global issue, therefore, as global citizens, it is our responsibility to understand how COVID-19 is impacting our lives and the people around us. However, it is clear over the past year that

this has not been the case for many people. Just last week, hundreds of people attended 'anti-lockdown' protests in two of Ireland's major cities, Dublin and Cork, and it is clear from the pictures and videos provided that no one was social distancing or wearing masks (McGreevy, 2021; O'Connor, 2021). Similarly, people attending college parties have been a recurring problem since the beginning of the pandemic (O'Sullivan, 2020; Burns et al., 2021) and as a recent graduate myself, this is disappointing to see from a generation that has grown up with so much access to unlimited amounts of information at the click of a button. Today's youth, including myself, have grown up surrounded by technology and the internet and it is the youth of today that will be the leaders of the future. Therefore, we have an obligation to use this technology to educate ourselves and better ourselves so that we can better our future. Consistently seeing these students attend party after party is so discouraging to see, especially when it is so easy to access information online about the damage COVID-19 is having on the world.

In my opinion, everyone has a responsibility to protect those around them and stop the spread of COVID-19. Therefore, everyone who attended those protests and attended those college parties has ignored these responsibilities and have chosen to act selfishly as opposed to selflessly. Whilst I do agree that everybody has the individual right to freedom of movement and freedom of speech, when those rights are negatively impacting other's individual right to life, then those rights should no longer be considered until it is safe to do so. Woon (2020) states that "every moral code we have is based on responsibility, not rights", and I agree with

this completely. If every individual had no sense of responsibility for others, then the world would be a lot more selfish, hectic, and dangerous than it already can be. The majority of complaints from these 'anti-lockdown' protests is that the government should not be allowed to impose laws that restrict people's movements, however, these laws "would be unnecessary if people could be counted on to behave responsibly even without compulsion" (Woon, 2020).

In conclusion, my experience with the COVID-19 pandemic has been a frustrating one. As someone who is so passionate about following my duty as a global citizen and protecting myself and others from the spread of COVID-19, it is so frustrating to see people who seem to be the complete opposite. People who value their individual rights and freedoms over the safety of others. One could argue that we should find a middle ground between individual freedoms and rights and collective responsibility, and maybe in a pre-COVID-19 world I would have suggested that it was a good idea. However, COVID-19 has completely flipped the world upside down and has changed the way we live forever, and in that world, collective responsibility trumps individual rights. Until the world is a safe place to go out in again, I am happy to give up some freedoms for now.

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Agnese Cigliano, Italy

A glimpse of what the world could look like if …

Since November 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged many aspects of our everyday lives, one of this being society and how we live. COVID-19 raised many questions and most of the answers are yet to be found. Probably, it is still too early for us to dwell on the evaluation phase. However, whilst we are still in the midst of facing the issues arisen from the pandemic, we can already start a mapping exercise and identify some of the patterns that firstly led to these problems, and which can possibly help us to solve them in the future. Maybe, the cause and the solution to what we will all remember as a turning point in our lives can be both found in the same analysis and context.

There is a powerful quote attributed to Albert Einstein: "If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on the solution, I would spend the first 55 minutes determining the proper question to ask… for once I know the proper question, I could solve the problem in less than five minutes".

Quotes are a tricky source of knowledge in our time: they are often made up on the internet, misattributed, distorted and, if anything, adapted to a new context depriving them of their original meaning and purpose. For this reason, I am often scared to refer to quotes, unless I have read them in a book authored by the person whom the quote is attributed to. This is to say that I have not done enough research to ensure this quote is correct, I admittedly have not done my due diligence. But in this case, the quote is so thought provoking that, even if we assume Albert Einstein did not say that ever in his lifetime, the quote itself is still worth mentioning. In line with this quote, we need to start with the problem.

To do this properly, we need to go back to November 2019 when the earliest cases of COVID-19 were detected. And this is where the problem probably starts: even if the first cases were detected as early as November 2019, they were only eventually reported by the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission in China at the end of 2019. I see this as an important element to keep in mind when discussing the role of global citizenship in a pandemic scenario. In a world that is overly connected and gentrified, why did it take so long to spread the alert about something so dangerous and unknown?

This element, and the question arising from it, leads to the second point I would like to look at: the sense of community. One of the many lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic is that we took many things for granted. I would like to argue that society, in its broadest and truest form, is one of them. And here is another question: what is society? I cannot provide an answer to that, but I could put together information to make us think about it and find a possible answer together. The term society derives from the Latin "societies", a term defining a group of people with friendly interactions. Coming a little bit closer to our time, some three or four centuries back, the concept of society is strictly linked to the idea of the social contract as elaborated by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The idea is that individuals agree to give up some of their freedom in exchange for rights and security, and by doing this they become citizens. I particularly like this idea, as it highlights the importance of the element of consent, which is a very timely topic for discussion. But what I would like to mention is how the first signs of this theory appeared in the work of Hugo

Grotius. For Grotius, the idea of society and social contract is strictly connected to the one of revolution. Whilst the contemporary idea of society, especially in the Western World, appears to be more contractual than anything, the social contract was in fact born from the need to put an end to indiscriminate violence and chaos, a factual response to the reality of the "homo homini lupus", which is quite rough and scary if we are reminded of it. Going back to Grotius, the organisation of society with a clear distribution of authority, as well as a comprehensive list of dos and don'ts, is the natural opposite of revolution and widespread individual power, meaning everyone can literally kill everyone, as far as they are capable of it and willing to do so. As scary and graphic as it is, I personally like to look back at this image, at the potential lack of society, to really bear in mind what is at stake. Also, this is not an alien concept to us, as coups and authoritarian turns still happen in 2021, giving us a glimpse of the "homo homini lupus", which used to be the rule in Roman times and was still a fresh image for many philosophers and thinkers in the 17th century. Our society is still founded on the basis of the social contract which, in our current times, possibly relies on the Global Goals and SDG17 (Partnerships for the Goal). So here are the questions: 1) What is society? and 2) What happens when society fails?

Now I will spend my 5 minutes, referring to Einstein's quote, to find an answer and a possible solution. As global citizens, and especially as youth, I believe it is our moral imperative to promote and protect our social contract, which nowadays consists of international treaties and, among others, the UN 2030 Agenda. Even if it is not to pursue the idea of sustainable development and the achievement of a better world for all, we should do it in the utilitarian sense of not wanting the opposite of society, which will inevitably happen if we do not work together to promote and protect our social contract. COVID-19 definitely offered us a glimpse of what the world could look like when we lack global common efforts and co-operation.

Bearing all this in mind, I personally believe that the first ethical obligation is to keep societies healthy and safe during the pandemic to align with that social contract and live our lives accordingly. In practical terms, it means respecting the laws and following all the recommendations from governments and international organisations to avoid the worsening of the pandemic. There is a second ethical obligation: to be an everyday advocate of that social contract and, today, of the UN 2030 Agenda. This may look different for everyone and will vary from taking active part in campaigns to just implementing small actions in our routines. But it is important to remember that we can all do our part and survive this TOGETHER.

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Federica Lorusso, Italy

Social responsibility is not a cultural attribute

"Global citizenship is about the shared human experience. It acknowledges and celebrates that, wherever we come from and wherever we live, we are here together. Our well-being and success are ultimately interdependent. We have more to learn from one another than to fear about our future." (World Economic Forum, 2017).

This definition of global citizenship given by the World Economic Forum is relevant for this discussion as it illustrates that, as global citizens, we all must keep our community healthy and safe. Younger people, in particular, are called to take responsibility and contribute to the health and security of the people around them, not only by following the rules but also by helping out those in need. Individual rights are not the same as individualism, and COVID-19 has shown how anybody's rights end when they harm someone else as protecting people around us serves our own interest as well.

My country, Italy, was the first country to experience the pandemic in Europe. Even if people tended to be careful and respectful during the first lockdown, Italians are not usually known for their compliance to rules. According to a YouGov poll, whilst 92% of Italians declare that they have been following the rules, only 51% of them declare the same about the people in their community – meaning that the first number might not be that reliable (Massara, 2021). The younger generation, in particular, was accused by both politicians and the media of not following the rules, and teenagers are often portrayed as spoiled and only interested in having fun. This kind of 'generational war' has been going on since the start of the pandemic, and it is still possible to find a title bashing the "movida"

(nightlife) in Italian newspapers. However, it is individualism that drives this kind of attitude, and it is not unique to Italy. One example is the anti-mask movement that has been parading around Europe, passing on the false belief that wearing a mask is a choice as we live in a democratic society. Yet, it is evident that this pandemic is not something we can overcome without common efforts. Masks themselves are the perfect example: they work only if everyone wears them.

This has been described as the struggle between individual rights and collective rights. Newspapers have emphasised the divide between the European and Asian approaches to the pandemic, and how the former is not bringing the results we hoped. Many anthropologists make a distinction between individualistic cultures – Western societies – and collectivist cultures – Asian societies – and, according to a Voice of America article from July 2020, this is the detail that is making the difference (Jennings, 2020). In Asia, people tend to be collectivist in their orientation as the collective good is explained to them in a self-evident way. Confucianism has also been cited as another cultural force in East Asia, advocating duties to society over individual needs. In Europe, on the other hand, many people have been focusing on their own right to make a choice, an idea that, whilst deemed sacred on many occasions, does not align with the interests of society.

However, there is a flaw in this reasoning; the issue is to equate individual rights with individualism. The truth is that individual rights, as well as freedom, stop where others' rights begin. Social responsibility is not a cultural attribute, we can learn it, and we can spread it in our societies. During the pandemic, many

people in Italy have shown a great sense of responsibility, not only staying at home, and respecting the rules but also helping people in their own community that otherwise could not be able to do so. During the first lockdown, there have been many initiatives meant to allow vulnerable people to stay home. Entire communities have organised themselves to deliver food and medicines to both elders and people in need. It was the first week of March 2020 when I received a call from a student from my University in Turin asking me to help with food delivery to people living alone. Many students living away from their homes started volunteering to buy groceries for the elders in their block. It was the case of a group of boys from Basilicata living in the north when the lockdown started. They designed a signboard that went viral; they offered their help to all elders or people with physical disabilities. It inspired many other young people to replicate this act of kindness around the country. In Bergamo, one of the cities hit worst by COVID-19, a group of people volunteered to bring medicines and food to quarantined people. Many associations have also organised groups of young people willing to call elders stuck alone in their houses. All these activities have the potential to be 'more contagious' than the virus and help to create a greater sense of community, a feeling that is often lacking in European cities. Starting to engage with our communities, both abiding by the rules and helping those who may not be able to, has the potential of changing the perception of the world around us. It starts a positive cycle: caring about our communities will make us more aware of the need to protect them from harm. It is a valuable lesson, not only for health and well-being but also for the other Sustainable Development Goals.

In conclusion, the very notion of global citizenship compels us to take care of the people around us, both by respecting the much-needed rules implemented during this pandemic and by helping our communities. This idea, however, does not go against the sacred democratic notion of individual rights and freedom as these are distinct from individualism. The fact that 'my freedom ends where yours begins' is not only a powerful statement but also a founding principle of well-functioning societies.

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Kohei Yamada, Japan

Cultural responsibility as an instrument for society

What is the right thing for all of us to do during this pandemic? How do we expect others to behave? How am I supposed to manage my life with people? We have all thought about these questions at least once in the past year. It could have occurred whilst watching news or talking with friends and families about how millions of the world's population continue to suffer from health consequences every day. Debates on individual rights and collective responsibility were all over across cultures. But I view it a little differently. I don't think that these two are mutually exclusive concepts that cannot coexist with one another. I believe the real collective responsibility should come with a respect for individual responsibility, freedom and rights. Or, in other words, collective responsibility is a necessary instrument for ensuring the wellbeing of every citizen.

One of the examples that illustrates this point is the mask dispute. I still remember in March or April 2020, in the early stage of the pandemic, I was watching an Australian news channel where an anchor invited a number of panellists to share different views on wearing a mask. Some 'experts' were against the idea of imposing people to wear a mask because it would increase public anxiety and restrict individual freedom of not wearing a mask. They even said that a mask does not prevent the spread of the virus. These voices were broadcasted nationwide. Around the same time, I saw a clear divide among countries on their decision over the mask requirement. But clearly, wearing a mask is not just your choice because your decision affects others. If it's only you who faces the consequences, you may claim an agency to act upon. In the case of infectious diseases like COVID-19, however, your decision of not wearing

a mask heightens the risk of others' health and wellbeing. The principle of individual freedom does not suggest that it's okay to sacrifice others' freedom. Individual freedom should be embraced to the extent that it does not invade the wellbeing of other members of society. It's as simple as this. With this logic, we would need collective decisions or respect to each other in order to ensure our individual rights to good health. This is one of the reasons I see collective responsibility as an integral part of real individual rights and freedom.

Another example is from my own country, Japan, where I saw that people were reluctant to change the way they are used to living and working. A lot of things have changed over the past year in the country, but it was still common to see crowds in big cities during commuting hours despite the nationwide urge for social distancing. In many cases, companies asked employees to come to office to work despite the alarming situation. Employees had to take the risk of being infected. In other cases, workers preferred to working in their usual way, downplaying the risk of being infected and infecting others due to their preference. We can discuss the dignity of individual freedom only when we know it does not entail negative consequences towards others in our communities.

Having said this, however, we would need a very careful examination when taking a collective approach. This is because depending on how it's carried out, it easily results in hindering individual rights. For instance, I saw a number of countries in Asia, including Thailand where I am currently based, that introduced extreme measures to punish citizens who do not follow

national orders. In other cases, in the effort to curve infections, countries imposed a strict curfew and made it mandatory for people to install an app to enable governments to track their movements. We know that tracking physical movements may be effective to identify potential outbreaks and prevent the further spread of the virus. But when there is public mistrust against authority, there is often a rising concern over citizen's privacy and freedom. When a country is taking a collective approach, full accountability and transparency in all processes involved are needed.

Collective responsibility does not automatically mean restricting individual rights or freedoms. If it's carried out correctly, it becomes an important instrument to guarantee individual rights. In reality, however, we share concerns over our rights being hindered by external decisions or actions imposed. When a collective responsibility approach is justifiable, it should be given enough accountability and transparency to convey common purposes and values that are shared by societies.

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Aruzhan Otegenova, Kazakhstan

Misleading information is worse than no information

In our ASEFYLS4 thematic session on SDG3: Good Health and Well-being, the expert speaker Dr Paloma Cuchi, WHO Representative and Head of Country Office in the Republic of Poland, gave her speech and mentioned one important point I cannot agree more with: no one is safe unless everyone is safe. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic proved to us the importance of the main concepts behind Sustainable Development: urgency for action and unity in fighting global challenges. Therefore, I think that all of us are obliged to behave with a great sense of responsibility towards each other. As a youth representative, I strongly emphasise this point on ethical obligations and further focus on some of them and explain why they do matter during the pandemic.

Firstly, in my opinion the most important thing in a pandemic is to always follow regulations. Unfortunately, I had the chance to experience myself and witness how ignorant some individuals can be towards the community they live in, especially young people who do not obey the rules in public places and put the older generation at risk. Therefore, I think in the current situation that the first thing every single person has to do before going outside is to wear a mask (World Health Organisation, 2020a). It is so crucial to understand that by doing so you are not only protecting yourself, but also other people you might encounter in the next couple of hours. Keeping a distance during the pandemic is definitely a must-have action for each and every one as the infection with COVID-19 could even occur via airborne transmission, thus decreasing the risk of getting infected (World Health Organisation, 2020b). Therefore, it is necessary for all of us to follow the rules and be mindful of our actions, especially for the younger

generation as we need to take into account our active lifestyles.

The next thing I am going to discuss about is the vaccination. It is an especially hot topic in my country since people here are often scared of getting vaccinated and refuse to receive it just out of fear of the unknown. Since nobody has the right to force people to get a vaccine, it is crucial to understand the science behind the vaccine and try to think thoroughly before deciding on this issue. It is worth mentioning that vaccines against COVID-19 are safe since they were intensively monitored and tested prior introducing to hospitals (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021) In addition, already millions of people in the United States were vaccinated and only mild side effects are known which are expected since they signal that the vaccinated body is building a protection system against COVID-19. Moreover, as we know, viruses are non-living structures and can only mutate when they inhabit their hosts (Kaiser, 2021). As SARS-CoV-2 mutates within our body, the importance of vaccine is very high. It is also worth to keep in mind that COVID-19 is new to us and that scientists have very limited information about it compared to other diseases. No full information on the life-long effects of COVID-19 on a human body is known for sure compared to vaccines with expected mild side effects. Considering all these factors, even though receiving vaccine is a personal choice, I would still consider it as an ethical obligation as it helps to gain herd immunity and protect those who cannot be vaccinated due to different safety reasons.

And last but not least, I would like to discuss the widespread misleading information about

COVID-19 during the pandemic. Misleading information is worse than no available information as it causes unnecessary actions and severe consequences, especially if we consider diseases and outbreaks. Moreover, not all of us are experienced in fact-checking as it requires a certain level of knowledge and understanding. Therefore, I strongly emphasise that it should be an ethical obligation for every one of us to avoid any misleading information regarding the virus and disease in times of pandemic, as false information might worsen people's health and even put their life at risk. I would like to mention that we, the youth, taking into account that information is more accessible to us compared to our parents and grandparents, should be mindful of our actions and be responsible of what we are doing.

In conclusion, COVID-19 negatively affects most aspects of our daily life. However, we should not consider the COVID-19 crisis as a failure, but as a huge driving power that promotes learning on how to fight global challenges. One example is to be mindful of our actions, including avoiding the spread of misleading information, to be ethically responsible as a community member and to follow all the regulations.

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Shangyoon Park, Korea

With empathy comes a sense of responsibility

The COVID-19 virus spread around the world, leading to lockdowns, public health crisis, economic crisis, and countless deaths. People are busy blaming one another for the spread. In the case of South Korea, the target of the blame shifted for each surge. In the beginning, people started blaming Chinese people. After a spike of infections from a church, people started blaming Christians. After a surge of numbers from a club in Itaewon, an area popular among foreigners, people started blaming foreigners. With the increased blame we must ask ourselves: Do we have responsibilities as global citizens to keep our societies healthy and safe during the pandemic?

With globalisation and digitalisation, the world has become more and more connected. Companies operate in a global scale, we can watch news happening on the other side of the world in real time through social media, and there are international organisations such as the United Nations. Whilst there's a lot of controversy regarding the pros and cons of globalisation, the recent political trend of protectionism and the travel bans due to the pandemic, it is still important to acknowledge that countries and people can mutually benefit through co-operation, especially in the context of a pandemic. It is true that due to the interconnectedness of the modern world, the COVID-19 virus has spread all over the world quickly. Whilst we can't go back in time and change this, what we can do is to co-operate with one another to come up with a global strategy to address this global problem.

Some people argue that individual rights should be protected rather than sacrificed. They argue that people should be free to choose whether or not to wear a mask, go out or travel, and get vaccinated. However, imagine the number of deaths due to COVID-19 if these individual rights were allowed. Will these individual rights still be justified if they cause other people to lose their lives? Whilst individual freedom is a valuable right, in the times of a pandemic, it's more important to limit individual freedom for the collective health of the international society. Therefore, every global citizen has the responsibility to limit its actions and follow the guidelines regarding lockdown and social distancing. This is not only to protect individuals, but also to protect their families and friends, their societies, their countries, and the entire world.

Every global citizen has the ethical obligation to stop the spread of this virus and to create a resilient society. Political leaders should make sure testing is affordable, people are quarantining whilst also taking into consideration the economic damage happening due to the pandemic. Business owners should make sure their workers are safe. There should be enough healthcare workers and facilities. Teachers should make sure their students are receiving similar quality of education to pre-pandemic times. Parents should make sure that they are taking care of their children whilst balancing working from home. How about the youth? Which kinds of ethical obligations do youth have to keep our societies healthy and safe?

Even though it has been proven that COVID-19 cases among the youth have lower fatality rates, the youth should equally be cautious and abide by the regulations regarding social distancing. We should be responsible and try to stay strong

during these times of uncertainty. We should try to reach out to our family and friends online and check on them during these difficult times. We should help one another as much as we can. We should support small businesses. We should be responsible for our education, career and personal growth despite the limitations and struggles of staying at home.

As a young professional, I have also felt a lot of anxiety and fear during this pandemic. I miss the past where I could travel freely and meet people without masks. I have seen how so many jobs and lives have become vulnerable due to the virus. However, I was able to stay strong and feel connected with humanity during the times of social distancing. I have connected with other youth around the world, discussed about the challenges that we face and how we can solve them. I was able to empathise with others struggling with their relationships, mental health, education and career due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With this deep empathy, I felt a sense of responsibility to do my part to solve this crisis.

I am optimistic that with the collective responsibility of all generations, we can overcome this pandemic. Whilst the pandemic has been very challenging in terms of uncertainty, fear, blaming, and radical changes, it has also been a time for reflection and innovation. We now know the things in life we shouldn't be taking advantage of. We know that we are strong enough to survive this pandemic and future struggles.

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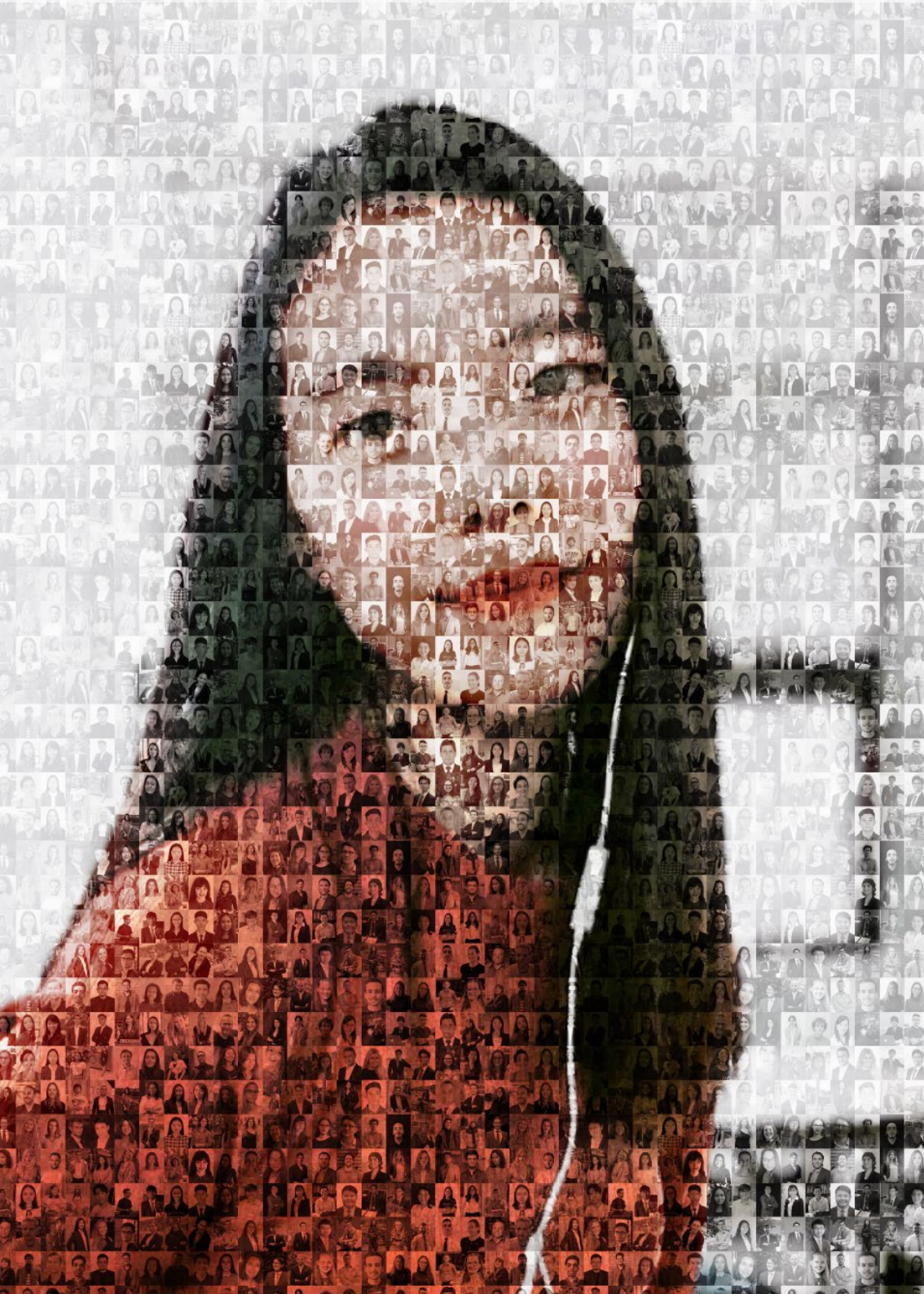
Scarlett Son, Korea

The middle ground between individual rights and collective responsibility

As a global citizen, I believe that we all deserve an individual right to be and feel free about our own behaviours and express opinions, but only to the extent where we can be fully responsible for our actions. In a situation like the worldwide pandemic outbreak, my own actions' consequences can unwillingly and unintentionally affect others in negative ways, resulting in violating one's liberty and damaging one's health. And that is why a collective responsibility approach is needed and why we should find a middle ground in between the two concepts of individual rights and collective responsibility. We need to understand how our behaviours can affect others and why we should abide by the rules delivered by the governments. I'll further elaborate on this point by comparing the Western and Eastern response to the pandemic situation and the general social awareness on the actions taken by the government officials.

According to a Channel News Asia article, three factors appear critical when it comes to health-related behaviours: norms, attitudes, and perceived behavioural control (Koh, 2020). Here, norms are described as how strictly a culture expects a certain behaviour. The West is relatively loose in terms of societal norms, as individual autonomy is more valued. This explains why so many people in western countries are against wearing facial masks as they believe it infringes on their individual rights and forces them to do something against their free will. Asia, on the other hand, handled this really well with a vast majority of citizens agreeing on government actions to mandate mask-wearing and strengthening social distancing.

The second factor, attitudes, include people's subjective beliefs and evaluation of behaviour. Government actions actually play a big role in forming one's attitude in this pandemic as people rely on the information and data provided by public media and government statements. The country should be able to communicate with their citizens in a timely, transparent manner to help them understand the current status quo and future plans, as well as the following actions that will be taken and should be taken both at the national and individual level. That way, people can take advantage of their individual rights whilst being conscious of the acceptable boundaries to the concept of collective responsibility. For instance, one can decide to meet their friends outside but with less than 5 people and come back home by 10pm, to comply with the government's social distancing rules. Asian countries like Singapore and South Korea have been praised for their prompt and clear communication as well as their extensive and affordable testing systems.

However, understanding how some countries reacted to the pandemic situation better than others goes beyond societal norms and attitudes. This is where the third factor – perceived behavioural control – comes in. This has more to do with individuals' attitudes and endeavours towards government orders and social norms. We can be aware of our individual sense of responsibility and try to follow the rules even if that means restraining from our craving to go out, hang out with others, move around places, and doing things that we considered as our freedom and individual rights that shouldn't be violated. Or one can decide to be a lot more individualistic, jeopardising other people's health and freedom. Being in control of our

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own actions, we owe each other, as global citizens, the behaviour of accepting the need for collective responsibility by controlling our needs and urge to exercise our individual rights.

In summary, how countries handle pandemic situations can vary based on their societal norms and governments' attitudes towards the situation, data and communication level. However, individual's behaviours – another critical factor that can bring different consequences to this pandemic – is where we can find a middle ground in between the concepts of individual rights and collective responsibility. Controlling one's behaviours and actions as an individual with basic rights whilst keeping the boundaries of collective responsibility is where that middle ground can be found.

The last question is then the following: how can youth behave within this middle ground? In my opinion, youth should be able to understand and learn how to control their feelings and develop good habits when abiding by the rules without stressing themselves out too much. They should be able to set their values to what they believe in and commit to it, by caring for others in their own community and society, understanding that this is not just about their own rights but also about the impact their behaviour can have on others.

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Anoudeth Phanvilay, Lao PDR

Collectivism in isolationism

It has been over a year since the first outbreak. Interestingly, the Global South has generally fared better than so-called developed countries with more resources. It can be argued that with the pressure to adopt relatively lax policies to keep the economies afloat, COVID-19 has exposed the failures of our current global system where business entities are prioritised over the wellbeing of people and inequalities are growing. Whilst there is no perfect response to the pandemic, it seems that collectivist societies have adapted better to the new normal whilst saving lives in the process.

At the time of writing, there have been 2,610,925 deaths globally due to COVID-19 according to the World Health Organisation (World Health Organisation, 2021). Whilst preventive measures have been proven to help decrease infection and death rates, there is non-compliance. Even though vaccines have been developed, most people do not have access to them. On the other hand, there are deniers of modern medicine in those pockets of the world privileged enough to afford it. Following the theory of organicism, as people go into lockdown, so do countries and everything shuts down. These are unprecedented times in recent history, affecting all sectors, from education to health care and of course, economics. Although most of the world has reverted to isolationism, we can only get through this through collectivism. When there is a need for collective solutions, it is inevitable that some individuality will have to be compromised.

Whilst Lao PDR has virtually gone back to normal, we are still affected by COVID-19 due to globalisation. The hospitality industry has suffered, with many restaurants and hotels having to shut down due to the lack of tourism. There was an influx of returning migrant workers who are now unemployed. The education of children suffered during lockdown, especially for children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds and living in rural areas. These problems are not unique to my country. We may be different, but we share the same problems. Therefore, we are all in the same boat and must navigate through this together.

As global citizens, everyone must do their part. This brings up the difference between ethics and human rights. In an individualist society, it might be more likely that a citizen abuses their rights in order not to wear a mask or keep physical distance (Gupta et al., 2021). Ethics teach us that even if we can choose not to do those things, it is our moral obligation to do so in order to protect others, such as our friends and families, especially those who are most vulnerable. We must also extend this consideration to the marginalised groups of society to leave no one behind.

What we owe each other is our privilege during these difficult times. Supporting local business, reaching out to people or donating to a cause are small things that can make a difference for many people. Young people can make a difference when we make our voices heard, as seen with the recent wave of youth activism in the past months. You can educate others on the issues you care about. For instance, I had volunteered for a regional youth organisation that focused on human rights which I used my capacity to start a dialogue on the LGBTIQ community. Whilst not a lot of people attended, it empowered me to know that people were willing to listen and share their experience. When it comes

down to it, I believe that ignorance breeds fear and hatred. This is the root of discrimination, fertilised by misinformation. It is also the reason why some people choose not to follow preventative measures or reject vaccines. In order to move forward as a collective, we need to provide correct, factual information through conversation. Like vaccinations, this needs to reach enough people before we can see change.

As a male, I cannot fully understand the burdens of women, and will never have to face the increased risk of gender-based violence during quarantine (Mlambo-Ngcuka, 2020). I did not think about discrimination against Muslims, until I was detained at an airport in Europe for being Asian during the initial outbreak. I cannot change my privilege, but what I can do is listen and try to come out of this pandemic a better person. I urge you to do the same.

Ultimately, to keep our societies healthy and safe, we need to sacrifice our comfort. We must continue to wash our hands, put on our masks and try to limit our physical contact with others until the day we can all walk outside with freedom from fear.

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Zane Skujina, Latvia

Collective responsibility to fight fake news

When we are kids, we can't understand the size of our surrounding environment – we live in our bubble, not even knowing what a province, city or country means and how large it is. We live with our families, meeting their friends and thinking that there is nothing else. Only at a certain age we start to understand the terms of latitude and longitude and to feel that we are a part of something bigger. We, as global citizens, are responsible for our local actions that create a global impact.

I would like to discuss a very serious topic which is shaping our society's opinion – fake news. Fake news is the most dangerous weapon in this information war happening as the world is struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences. I strongly believe that it is up to everyone – to every global citizen – to make sure that the information and the news shared on the internet, on the TV, on the radio or in the newspapers is based on true facts. People who publish fake news and incitement to hatred should be punished. But can we draw a line between freedom of speech and breaking the law? Is fake news simply not information we disagree with? And where does our collective responsibility start in fighting fake news propaganda?

Fake news is "fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organisational process or intent. Fake-news outlets, in turn, lack the news media's editorial norms and processes for ensuring the accuracy and credibility of information. Fake news overlaps with other information disorders, such as misinformation and disinformation" (Lazer et al., 2018) As far as we can agree, fake news is not something we simply disagree with: it should be clearly false and misleading information. Its purpose is not to inform, but to split society into two groups. This is especially the case in times of COVID-19, where fake news is produced to disinform people. In Italy, from 31 December 2019 to 30 April 2020, one of the most commonly searched topics on the internet was the origin of COVID-19, but 52% of published articles were proven fake (Moscadelli et al., 2020).

There is no doubt that social media is the fastest route for fake news to travel, exploiting public fear and uncertainty around the COVID-19 pandemic. This is why three of the biggest social media giants – YouTube, Facebook and Twitter – decided to join forces to fight fake news together with governments, fact checkers and researchers (Cellan-Jones, 2020). In my opinion, this fight is useless if local citizens are not joining these efforts, particularly the young generation which is usually more educated than elders in the context of Latvia.

'Act locally – think globally' is a key solution to this problem. Fake news is a global issue that can literally spread around the world in a few seconds. You can see articles with fake news from Europe being translated in Asia (and vice versa) within just a few days. And there are always people in every country who strongly believe in conspiracy theories on vaccines and the origin of COVID-19. When you read an article which is clearly fake news, stand up and raise your voice. Explain what is wrong with that article. You can fight conspiracy theories and be a fact checker yourself, limiting the spread of fake news around the world. Start in your community and your friend bubble, inspire

others to do the same and it will start to spread positively. You might feel that it has only a small impact, but it is quite the opposite.

It is not easy to be the first one to share opinions on sensitive issues such as fake news. You need a lot of courage to do it. You need to be prepared for backlash from people who believe that fake news stories are not fake but simply offer a 'different opinion'. In the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, it is mentioned that "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes the right to freely receive, keep and distribute information and to express his or her views. Censorship is prohibited" (Latvijas Republikas Satversme, 2019). Fighting fake news in Latvia is therefore hard as you need to be extremely careful not to offend anyone who has the right to freedom of speech, but this can save lives. Following US President Trump's false statement on disinfectant injections for COVID-19 prevention, the number of poisoning cases in the US doubled in the next two months compared to the year 2019 (Kluger, 2020).

So, what can we actually do? The best is to be proactive and loud! First, be aware of the current situation in the World and do so by following trustworthy sources, such as the BBC or The New York Times. Check official communication from Universities and Research Centres and follow trustworthy news anchors. Make sure to critically assess everything you read and to share real news on your social media newsfeed. Push people to think by writing your own opinion on the topic. If you see an article which might be fake, be a fact checker yourself and do your research. If someone in your friend circle has already published false information, be brave and stand up by asking this person to remove the content or drop a comment to explain why this article includes fake news. But the most important: don't be ignorant and remember that everything you do locally impacts events happening globally. Only together through collective responsibility can we help the world to be a little closer to trustful sources of news.

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Marleen Krausch, Luxembourg

Individual and collective compliance

I. Individual rights

When it comes to individual rights, each citizen must have the right and equal access to medical care and social protection. This translates into Governments, hospitals, doctors and nurses being bound by the obligation to provide care to each individual patient and to society in general and keep the citizens healthy and safe. More specifically, healthcare facilities should be able to accommodate (new) patients, physicians and nurses on the front lines of COVID-19 who, understandably, face a lot of moral distress when providing care to COVID-19 patients, and should not, in principle, refuse to provide care to COVID-19 patients. The right and access to healthcare and wellbeing also includes the right to be vaccinated.

We furthermore do not only have the individual right to social protection and healthcare, but also a more general right to freedom and liberty, which gives each of us the right to live our life the way we want to. However, during the pandemic, people have been more or less deprived of their right to liberty. Government recommendations/ restrictions regarding social distancing, wearing a protective mask, curfews, quarantine, etc., have substantially limited our freedom to reunite, to socialise and so on. The government decided to protect and prioritise collective wellbeing to the detriment of our personal lives and liberties, requiring everyone to make rather big changes to their lifestyles.

II. Collective responsibility

As members of society, we have a responsibility towards each other during the current pandemic: we have the responsibility to minimise the

possibility that our behaviour exposes others to the risk of contracting the virus and, hence, to reduce the spread of COVID-19. People should show solidarity with each other and refrain from thinking in terms of 'extreme individualism'. We should all be willing and ready to make any concessions necessary to protect the wellbeing of society as a whole, especially the wellbeing of the elderly and most vulnerable parts of our society.

If each and every citizen would have agreed to pull in the same direction right from the start of the pandemic, this would have had a significant impact on the development of the pandemic and, maybe, societies would have managed to get a better hold of the spread of the virus. When comparing how Asian and Western societies handled the spread and containment of COVID-19, we have to conclude that Asian countries handled the pandemic more successfully, because most people put their own freedom aside for the common good. Western individualism – and its mindset focused on personal freedom – has undeniably caused higher infection and mortality rates.

III. Is there a middle way?

The pandemic created a conflict between two fundamental rights: the right to individual liberty (Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) and the right to health and wellbeing (Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). In such a situation, governments and their Head of States have to strike a balance between these fundamental rights and take the measures that seem most appropriate in each case, even if this entails an infringement on individual rights and liberty. Collective wellbeing has to be prioritised and there is no way around

it: hence, in my opinion, there is not really any middle way. We cannot count on fully voluntary action by society to contain the spread of the virus; we need government intervention to provide comprehensive and mandatory rules to encourage individual and collective compliance.

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Nur Syahirah Khanum, Malaysia

Power structures and COVID-19: the invisible becomes visible

The COVID-19 pandemic has made the invisible visible whilst illustrating the fragility of life as we viscerally grasp our personal, yet collective experience of the pandemic. Whilst no one is exempt from experiencing COVID-19, our conditions and circumstances, and cultures, determine how we adapt to this pandemic. This results in varying approaches to COVID-19 whilst pursuing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and preparing for the imminent threats of climate change. In this opinion piece, I reflect on the efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and adapt to climate change. I also draw lessons from these measures that reinforce our collective responsibility in addressing crises.

COVID-19 impacts, and the success of solutions are subjected to varying factors and circumstances. Nonetheless, many governments – particularly in the West – have been failing to efficiently and systematically apply necessary knowledge and mechanisms in mitigating this pandemic (Dubb, 2020). This failure has caused lost lives and a collective trauma affecting the wellbeing of people, particularly their mental health. A few major stressors are causing emotional distress and jeopardising one's mental health during this pandemic such as the "imposition of unfamiliar public health measures that infringe on personal freedoms, large and growing financial losses, and conflicting messages from authorities" (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020, para 1). COVID-19 disrupts our lives including how we cope with major stressors. Hence, it has significant psychosocial and psychological impacts on people.

Despite the variety of stressors, it is interesting to observe that the debate about collective

responsibility and individual rights, norms and values is given more attention in the media. However, there is little debate about the power structures or leadership culture of the countries that have successfully or unsuccessfully contained the pandemic. The media outlets have been responsible for reproducing stories that assert the narrative of the "Chinese virus" when the previous American president, Donald Trump made that particular comment. Due to this, there has been a spike in Asian American hate crimes (AFP, 2021). From my experience in advocating for climate change, this is a familiar tactic by the media to shift our attention. The media are responsible for pushing a particular narrative. In the case of climate change, the media play a crucial role in raising levels of awareness, influencing knowledge on climate change and responsibilities to address the problem (Carvalho, 2010).

As the impacts on mental health are being discussed in the media, we need to discern the narrative about the impact of COVID-19 on mental health. We must be critical of the dominant narrative and discourse in the media about COVID-19. Through the communication of COVID-19 policies and recovery strategies, I could observe that the government is shifting the burden towards citizens to take care of themselves and each other. In Malaysia, the Prime Minister has adopted the language of local social movements via the slogan "#KitaJagaKita", loosely translated to "we take care of ourselves" in his broadcasted message, whilst the ministerial cabinet continues to provide incoherent conflicting policies.

Similar to climate change and sustainable development, we cannot make individual change without "challenging larger structural political and economic conditions" (Asi, 2019). For this reason, I believe that we must shift from debating the question of collective responsibility or individual rights, towards critically assessing the power structures that exist within the leadership regime. The leadership regime crucially affects our wellbeing which is a structural issue and not an individual issue.

It is part of our collective responsibility to expand our perspective from an individual level of change to collective change. This perspective will allow us to understand the structural aspects that contribute to the failure of the government to mitigate the pandemic and implement better solutions. According to Choong (2021), the impact of policy change is often measured "by its ability to influence visible power, tied to institutional benefits and rewards" (para. 3) instead of the actual improved lived realities of the target populations of particular policies. He further asserts that policy change does not directly impact social change, and vice versa unless there is a critical assessment of power. In the case of COVID-19, this particular value-based debate on how we could better organise ourselves does not necessarily reflect into more effective policies, unless we negotiate power.

Power is reflected in various socio-economic and socio-cultural aspects. Aspects such as "race/ethnicity, gender, class, and economic situation (shape) the ability of communities to adapt to climate change" (Munshi et al., 2020, page. 4). These aspects affect how people assert their power in the decision-making process. However, the current decision-making space is narrow due to the narrow political interest (Choong, 2021). There is a need to reconfigure social, political, and economic relationships in our society as a way to exercise collective responsibilities.

The threats of climate change and the harms of COVID-19 highlight the importance of exercising collective responsibility. Besides listening to the experts, we must listen to the powerless – those affected the most. Many experts have argued that for effective climate change adaptation, a localised and decentralised approach is required. According to Arriens (2019), "communities vulnerable to climate change are sometimes the most active and innovative in adapting to it" (para. 4). However, their power is invisible as it is not acknowledged by institutions or governments. The Global Commission of Adaptation alongside the World Resources Institute and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) have developed a set of principles to strengthen locally led adaptation by conducting over a year of consultations. The idea is to change "current top-down approaches to a new model where local actors have greater power and resources to build resilience to climate change" (WRI, 2021).

Collective responsibility too is exercised through the process of the Voluntary National Reviews (VNR). The VNRs facilitate the exchange of national experiences in pursuing the SDGs and they are presented yearly at the UN High-level Political Forum convened by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in July every year. Whilst it is a national process, it involves the participation of members of civil society and non-governmental organisations. In other words, it takes a whole-of-governance (WoG) and whole-of-society (WoS) approach. According to Cázarez-Grageda, meaningful multi-stakeholder participation requires inclusive representation, transparency, commitment, and accountability besides the space for collective efforts and collaboration of knowledge creation (IISD, 2019). Additionally, important aspects of a WoS approach are trust and situation awareness (Dubb, 2020). Thus, a WoG and a WoS approach are vital for COVID-19 recovery.

These global experiences and processes remind us that we need a collective responsibility based on equal human dignity by generating an understanding of the different circumstances and lived realities. The conventional social-economic and political aspects of power do not do us justice in shaping equitable social and economic policies which preserve the sanctity of lives that exist in various local contexts. Ultimately, as youths, we have the responsibility to reshape the idea of collective responsibility that involves the interrogation of current norms and deconstruction of current structures that undermine trust and situation awareness of our society.

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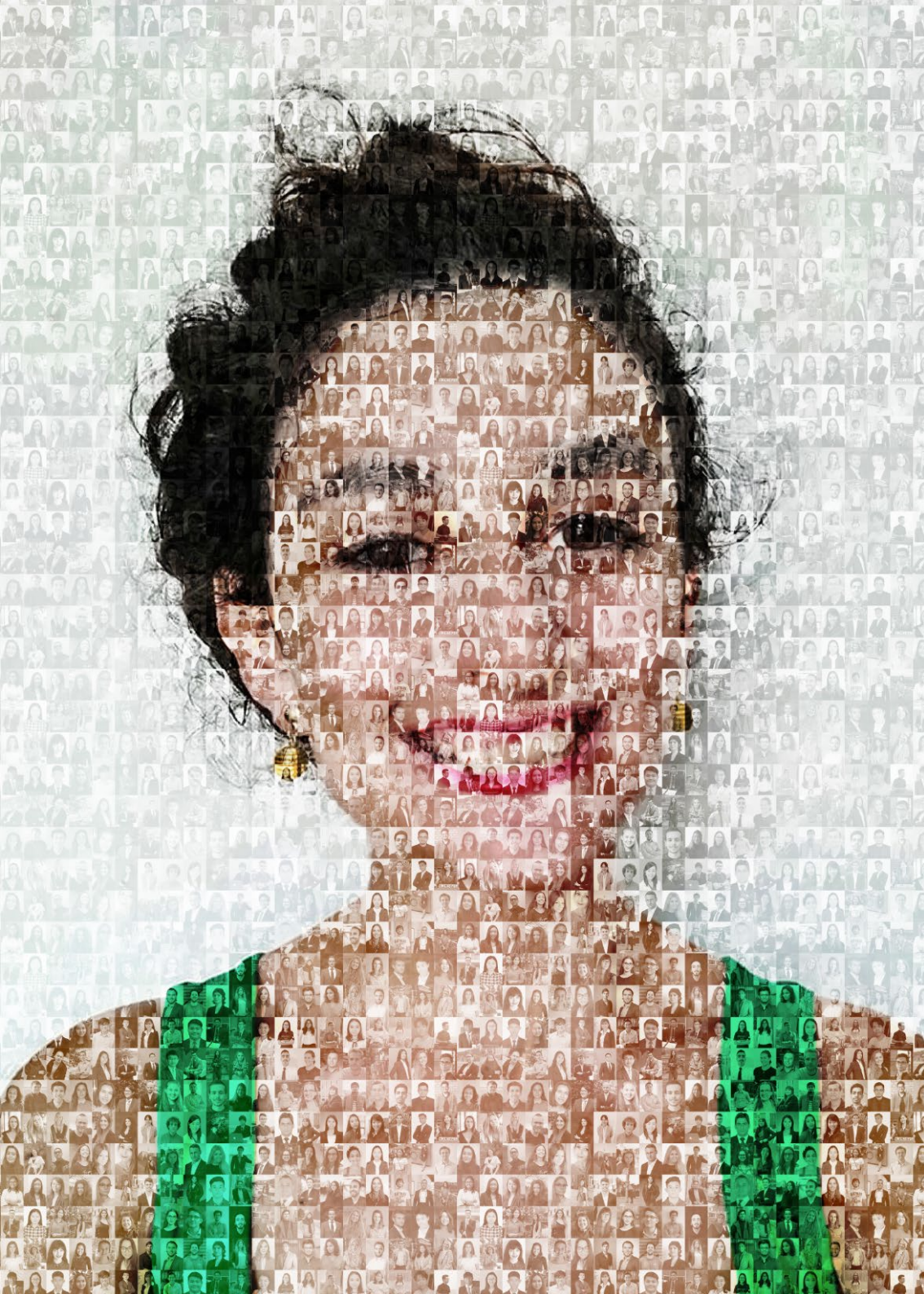
Lisa Zammit, Malta

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"A global citizen is someone who is aware of and understands the wider world – and their place in it. They take an active role in their community and work with others to make our planet more peaceful, sustainable and fairer." (Oxfam GB, n.d.).

As a person who has travelled frequently for studies, work and leisure, I firmly believe that we owe it to each other to keep our societies healthy and safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. We cannot expect to have the benefits of globalisation without accepting responsibility for its consequences. We have to look out for one another, for those within our communities and beyond, making sure that no one gets left behind. But what do I mean when I say 'we'?

First and foremost, I am referring to responsibility at an individual level. It is I, Lisa, who has to make an effort to follow the government's regulations: wearing a mask when required, maintaining social distance, using hand sanitiser, working from home if possible, avoiding large gatherings, etc. This is easy enough to do, as I could get fined if I do not follow these rules. But what about following the government's recommendations, such as meeting friends and family or travelling only when absolutely necessary? This is where it gets tricky.

Having lived in Italy since the start of the pandemic, up to now, the mid-third wave of the pandemic, it is clear that it cannot be left to the people to be responsible, adhere to measures and follow recommendations by the government, so as to keep the infection numbers down. Whilst this might have worked in some Asian countries that perhaps had recent experiences

of epidemics, it does not seem to work in most European countries (Cheung, 2020).

Which brings me to the second level of responsibility, the one at a collective level, which is influenced by authoritative institutions, for example governments, to put it simply. Governments have the responsibility of providing their citizens with clear and effective instructions based on scientific evidence and transparency, and of ensuring that citizens are treated equally and fairly. Moreover, one of the reasons why some Asian countries had more capacity to handle the pandemic than European ones, was because they invested heavily in public institutions (Mahbubani, 2020). Citizens, on the other hand, need to be able to put their trust in the government, to follow instructions and recommendations, to put collective needs above individual ones, to ensure a healthy and safe future for all.

But in reality, we all know that this is easier said than done. Whilst some governments have struggled to find the right strategy of dealing with the complexities of the contexts of their countries to handle the pandemic (Brandt & Wörlein, 2020) sending mixed messages to citizens which made them lose their credibility (Keaten & Cheng, 2020), they in turn have also received inconsistent messages from health experts (Rath & Baskin, 2020). No wonder citizens who have gone in and out of lockdown, facing constant changing measures and restrictions, are getting fed up (Giugliano, 2020).

But does this mean that public health and safety should be endangered to satisfy personal freedom? Throughout this year, the media has pointed out that Asian countries who value

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collective responsibility over personal freedom have handled the pandemic better, and that in Europe, the situation has been so disastrous because of 'loose' cultures and values (Koh, 2020).

Whilst I definitely cannot speak for the youth of the world, I can speak for the gainfully employed European youth, in saying that we need to challenge this belief. What happened to our so-called European values of solidarity, respect and care for others (Vasco, n.d.)? Are those not enough to shrug off the modern selfishness, taking for granted our freedom to move and do as we please, without terms and conditions? We cannot justify our lack of responsibility and interest in each other's welfare on our importance of personal freedom, or the fear being restricted will change us in an irreversible way, losing our warmth and friendliness that came from frequent close contact and the habit of doing everything together (Jones, 2021).

"Prolonged lockdowns are damaging for the economy, whilst an epidemic is damaging to public health [...] there's not a lot of good choices" (Cheung, 2020). The question that every country is struggling to answer is: should the economy suffer because of people's irresponsibility and lack of self-discipline? And by the economy, we have to remember, that this represents the livelihoods of people, above all, of those that were already vulnerable to begin with (United Nations, 2020).

Which is why it is important that youth, who make up a large part of society, do their part in ensuring that the number of transmissions and infections stays low and healthcare services are relieved of some of their burden, so that lockdowns are avoided, the economy can revive, the pandemic slowly comes to an end, lives and livelihoods are saved, and finally, people can take back their personal freedom.

They can do this by encouraging friends to wear masks, discouraging large gatherings, calling out people who are organising parties, having online meetings instead of face-to-face when possible, getting tested if necessary, adhering to measures, avoiding unnecessary travelling, not undertaking any risky behaviour, and so on. Every small step counts.

Being a global citizen who understands the world and your place in it requires access to opportunities and resources, such as financial, educational and technological, that a large proportion of the world does not have. Not everyone has the privilege of being a global citizen, and those who do, are not fulfilling the duty that comes along with this privilege. So those of you who have the privilege of fulfilling this duty, do it! Everyone will benefit from it. The future is yours to change.

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Lisa Zammit
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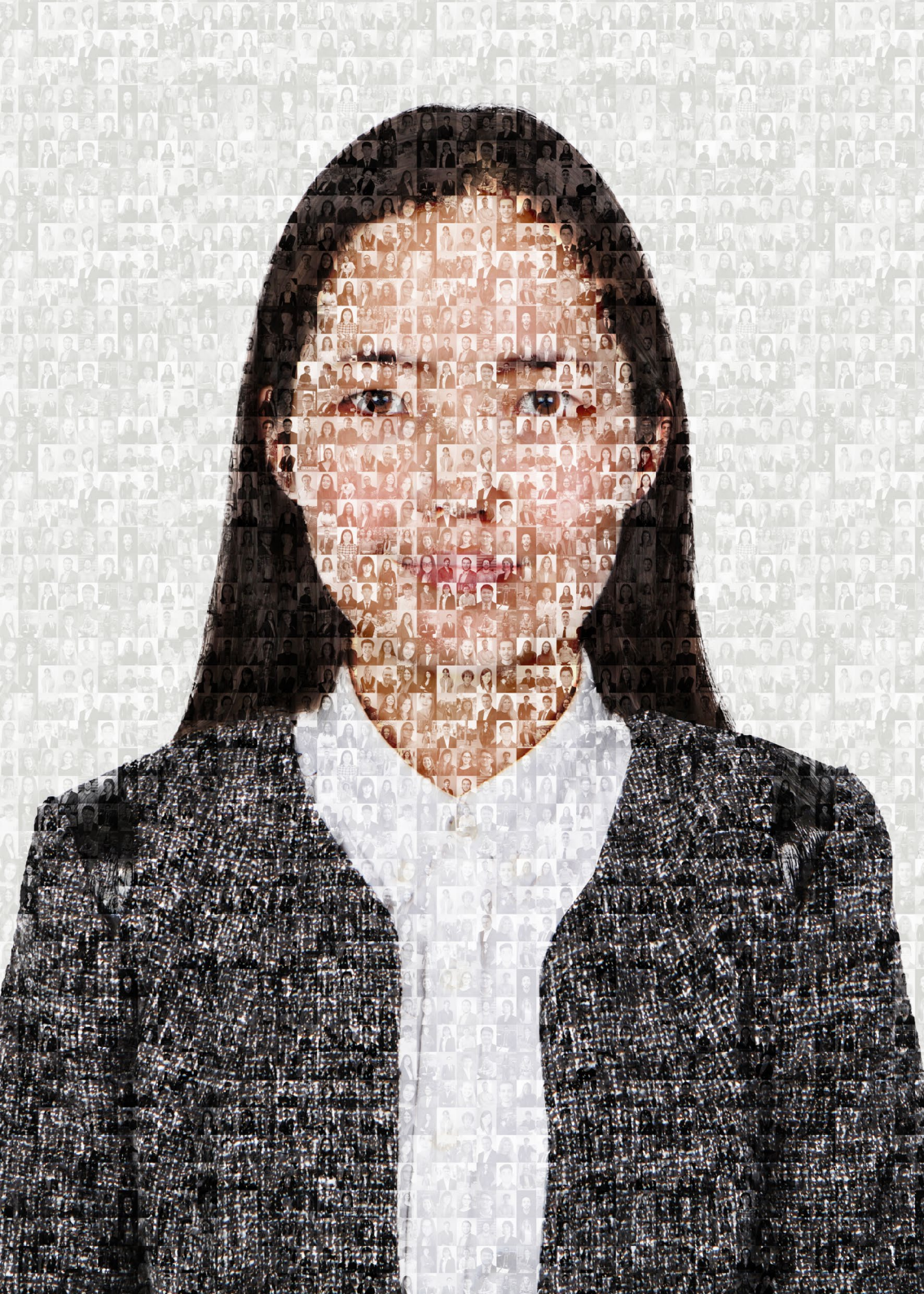
Munkhjiguur Bayarsaikhan, Mongolia

The dilemma of border closures

There was a massive divide between people in my country whether or not our borders should be opened to fellow Mongolians who work and live abroad. On the one hand, we had no domestically transmitted infections, and thus everything was normal as before. None of us wanted to risk this situation by welcoming people from abroad and from countries where the infection rates were spiking. On the other hand, sadly, hundreds of children were unable to meet their parents. Our economy rarely meets the primary needs of its people to provide a healthy and safe environment. Hence, many adults and parents had gone abroad to make money. Now, they could not come back because of border closures.

So, do they owe anything to each other? Do our children have to suffer, or should our country put an underdeveloped health system in jeopardy? These points were part of a hot debate several months ago.

On a global scale, we witnessed a massive divide between people, especially between Asians and Europeans. It is no longer a secret that there was a widespread anti-Asian sentiment across societies in early 2020. I heard from many of my Asian friends that they were subjected to racism or hatred even though they had done nothing wrong, like their fellow Mongolians who worked abroad and could not return home. At the same time, people began to praise the actions by Asian governments against COVID-19 whilst criticising the West for being irresponsible.

My answer to the question of whether we owe anything to each other is NO. No one owes anything to anyone, but we are all human at the core. We care for each other. We obviously

do not want to wish anyone harm. This is the main difference between the question and my answer. If we take love, respect, and kindness as obligatory principles, our actions to jointly fight against COVID-19 should come voluntarily. We should help, support, understand, and empathise with each other to overcome this pandemic. This would be a much more desirable way to communicate with each other.

The first step towards this objective would be a joint understanding that the pandemic is of global concern. It affects everyone in the world no matter if you are Asian or European. However, the people who are most impacted come from underprivileged communities and include women, children, or the elders. They do not only miss the ability to engage, be it through work or in social and physical community events, but many of them also often struggle with severe challenges and problems that are considered a societal taboo, such as domestic abuse. Whilst several developed nations adopted policies and actions to address these critical issues, people in developing or less developed countries suffered from losing financial and psychological support. It is not difficult to identify problems and express criticism, but we should understand that we are in this situation together.

As a second step, we need responsible policies. Every single government policy has an impact on its own citizens, as well as on people abroad in this globalised world. The context I mentioned earlier 'travelling across borders' is a good example. If we want to travel within our country or abroad, we should follow the government's instructions and guidelines. Travelling is not only for luxury, but many people also depend on it for work and collaboration. Should this kind

of necessary travel be given priority in times of the current crisis? Safe travelling does not only depend on government's policies and but also on people's behaviour.

One of the Mongolian parliament members correctly pointed out that we now have a rare chance to see how each government works towards exactly the same issue: finding solutions to mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic. We could learn from each other in real-time. We should take the best lessons and then implement suitable measures in our own country.

I hope that through a joint and better understanding among people, as well as responsible government policies, we can find a way that allows safe travel back home for our fellow Mongolians abroad and re-connect families without putting the local health system at risk.

Munkhjiguur Bayarsaikhan
Munkhjiguur is an undergraduate student of International Relations at the National University of Mongolia. She is an alumnus of the US Institute on Women's Leadership Program, Nagoya University Exchange programme in Japan, and the 9th Model ASEM. Munkhjiguur has an active role in several student organisations, including the Northeast Asian Student Round Table. She also implemented a project around an animation series with the aim to raise public awareness on disabilities. Munkhjiguur is an ASEFEdu alumnus

Pyae Naing, Myanmar

The role of the community

I experienced the start of the pandemic abroad when living in Thailand. The first COVID-19 case was reported here in early January 2020. When we heard the news for the first time, we were not very serious about the outbreak of the virus, given that we did not yet know much about it and how it would change our lives. We considered COVID-19 as a regular virus until the transmissions became frequent and extreme. Panic started to sink in, and people rushed to malls, clearing shelves, buying masks and sanitisers, which were at one point very expensive and hard to find. Cases hit the peak around March and then social distancing and curfews came into action. Thankfully in May, the cases dwindled down and for more than 3 months, Thailand was reported to be almost COVID-19 free. Things were going back to normal, the economy was restoring to its former state, and people were travelling around the country. However, sadly, around November, the cases soared up again and Christmas and New Year countdown festivities had to be cancelled.

The COVID-19 pandemic did not hit my home country, Myanmar, until August 2020. Whilst the cases in Thailand were decreasing, Myanmar dealt with many COVID-19 patients. Since Thailand is a more developed country than Myanmar, COVID-19 prevention measures, such as temperature screening and strict sanitisation guidelines, were implemented faster and more efficient here. Back home, it was very challenging to handle the cases even though our legitimate government of that time did whatever they could in their power.

I think that all governments tried their best to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and worked towards a COVID-19-free world. However, every country has its own specific conditions in terms of economic strength, financial resources, population size, living conditions of the people, and many more. Therefore, each country must find different techniques to stop the spread of the pandemic and, of course, at a different pace. No matter the techniques and pace, in the end, however, we are all aiming towards the same direction.

Next to the government, I think that the community plays a vital role in fighting against the pandemic. And at the end of the day, it all comes to us, the individuals, to do our part. The community can help educate the public about mechanisms to prevent the spread of the virus. They can provide locals with important materials and resources such as masks, hand sanitisers, and food (rice, oil, vegetables). And individuals should wear masks whilst outside, especially in crowded areas, so that vulnerable groups are safe. In general, as individuals, we can restrict ourselves from going out as much as possible and work from home. We can also buy products online and choose contactless services. We should follow the rules set by our government so that we can stop the spread of the virus. Representing the youth, I think we can also use social media to keep each other, and the public updated on health and safety rules, as well as to moderate between the government and the public. We can use our voices to help people be aware of how important it is to stay healthy and safe during the pandemic. We can also volunteer

in our local communities to demonstrate how to wear our masks correctly and to inform people about necessary hygiene procedures.

No matter where we are from or who we are, I am quite confident to say that we have one goal in common – it is to end this COVID-19 pandemic and to return to live our lives in normality.

Pyae Naing
Pyae holds a Bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering from Rangsit University and is on the path of pursuing a Master's degree in Water Engineering and Management at the Asian Institute of Technology. Currently, she is working on her research which focuses on Water-Energy-Carbon nexus in industries. Pyae has actively partaken in various conferences and training courses and has also actively volunteered as a provisional teacher in remote villages of Chiang Rai, Thailand.

Bart Heuts, Netherlands

Solidarity: a short-lived mirage or a real possibility?

In March 2020 after the COVID-19 outbreak, I returned to the Netherlands from Viet Nam. I had just started an internship at the Dutch Embassy in Hanoi, but it was being snapped away before my eyes. I was obviously disappointed, but fully understood that there was no other way: at the same time, the entire world went into lockdown. With a healthy dose of optimism, fuelled by all the fun things that filled my life in the months preceding the pandemic, I was able to adapt to life in lockdown and took my responsibility to not spread the virus seriously.

The Netherlands experienced a frightening first wave and the public healthcare was pushed to its very limits. Thankfully, the Dutch people demonstrated great compliance with rules and regulations during the lockdown and were able to help flatten the curve and bring daily infections back to a minimum. Across the country, people applauded healthcare workers and expressed a strong sense of compassion and solidarity. There was a great fear of the virus since no one really knew how to properly treat the infection or how the virus could spread around the country. Meanwhile, the intensive care units in hospitals were almost overflowing and gruesome details about people not able to breathe and overworked health workers came out. However, things started turning for the better and people saw that their actions had an impact. The daily infections diminished and slowly but steadily the country went out of lockdown.

Now, half a year later, the contrast is stark. Everywhere around me, people are becoming more and more opposed against continued government regulations. I can even hear myself questioning the latest extension of curfew and

observe a growing friction among people: when do individual needs and rights supersede public health requirements? Whilst many of us know that staying inside and limiting social contacts is the best way to end the pandemic as soon as possible, it seems that people increasingly find it unbearable to continue on this path of self-isolation. When are the costs of COVID-19-lockdowns higher than the disease itself?

The Netherlands went into lockdown again in October 2020. General compliance with COVID-19 prevention measures is low and the infection rate remains at a high level. This time around, people seem to lack the stamina to adhere to the strict guidelines. In the meantime, school children have had long periods with only digital education, and students' mental health is deteriorating. Although it is easy to think that the general ability to comply with COVID-19 prevention measures is getting lower the longer this pandemic lasts, the real reason lies deeper than that. Would it really be true that common sense and solidarity disappear, and the Dutch people resort to irresponsible behaviour? No. The problem is rather that people are not enabled to live their life with the virus. Whilst the fear for the virus in the first wave was due to many unknowns about the virus, this time around we know much better:

First, we know more about the way the virus spreads and its infectivity. Whilst the exact infectivity rate of new variants is still estimated by calculations, people know that infections can be brought down by wearing face masks, keeping a distance and washing hands. Then, tracking the virus in society has proven to work through a copious amount of testing. Third, protecting the most vulnerable groups

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in society through a 'social bubble' concept of interactions has shown that it can combine providing people with essential social contact and keeping hospitalisations due to COVID-19 low. And lastly, vaccinating the most vulnerable groups can significantly decrease the pressure on healthcare systems.

However, what did the Dutch government do? Instead of trusting the public with the responsibility to adhere to the basic hygienic rules and setting up the necessary policies and protocols to make a 'life with the virus' possible, the virus took the country with surprise in autumn 2020. Testing capacity was not scaled up properly, pressure on the hospitals rose and the government took strong measures to curb the spread of the virus, imposing a second lockdown. Whilst the testing capacity has been improved, the next step should have been a comprehensive vaccination strategy which many Dutch people did not see realising.

With these circumstances in mind, is it strange that citizens become estranged from the government policies against the virus? Will people accept a curfew, when the reason that infections are so high is partly due to negligence on behalf of the government? The answer is no. Whilst all people I know still want to take on their responsibility to battle this pandemic, people have more needs than just their physical health. If the government fails to make the basic precautions to create a new normal which enables its citizens to 'live with the virus', it is rewarded with a society that is unwilling to comply with the COVID-19 regulations. This is really unfortunate, since I am convinced that people want to do everything to safeguard public health. However, the government also has to show that it does everything in its power to guarantee individual rights to the fullest.

As we have seen, the first wave hit hard and the ignorance about the virus forced people to stay home. After one year, people have learnt that it is possible to limit the risks of the virus whilst being able to pick up some aspects of their normal lives. Therefore, I strongly believe that a government should do its part and come through with a comprehensive COVID-19-strategy that safeguards the individual's rights, in order to enable those individuals to act with the public health in mind.

Bart Heuts
Bart is finishing his Master's degree in International Relations & Diplomacy, a jointly taught programme by Leiden University and the Clingendael Institute. Previously, Bart interned at the Netherlands Embassy in Hanoi as Research Assistant in the Economic Affairs team, specifically initiating market studies on opportunities for the Dutch and Vietnamese agricultural sector. During his Bachelor's degree at Utrecht University, Bart co-organised a 6-week research project on the resilience of Suriname's civil society.

Helen Nagelhout, Netherlands

National policies are not simply transferrable

In multiple articles in the media and the academia, the approach that a number of different Asian countries took to combat the COVID-19 pandemic is, rightfully so, applauded. Countries like Cambodia, Singapore and Korea are examples for successful responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Reading these articles, I was struck by a question: would policies as set by these governments work in the Netherlands?

I personally think that the Dutch culture would not allow for measures to the extent of Singapore for example. Singapore was very quick in responding to the virus and started screening at its borders immediately after the government learnt about the outbreak. Testing facilities were set up in an efficient manner. What surprised me the most was Singapore's approach to quarantine. Here in the Netherlands, when someone has to isolate due to COVID-19, the isolation period of 14 days is strongly advised but it is not required by law. Thankfully, most people comply. In Singapore people have to send photographic proof of their whereabouts and are contacted several times a day to make sure they stay inside (Cheung, 2020). From a Dutch perspective, this is a huge invasion of privacy and goes against the right of people to have a private life. Right now, we are strongly encouraged to only have one visitor a day, but the government cannot enforce this as a rule because it is seen as a too authoritarian act.

When the government announced a curfew, some people even compared it to the curfew enforced by the Nazis during World War 2. When the government first spoke of limiting the size of groups, people immediately protested against the 'enforcement behind the front door', saying that the government was not allowed to control

what people do in their own home. It is very clear that the Dutch people expect and accept different policies from their government than the people in Singapore.

The journalist Walter Woon writes that this difference in expectation and acceptance can be summarised in two terms: 'personal freedom' and 'collective responsibility'. According to Woon, the West values personal freedom above collective responsibility, whilst Asian countries are the reverse. Here in the Netherlands, the most common complaint in relation to the measurements taken by the government is that they restrict someone's personal freedom too much. Opponents to the measurements in the Netherlands are protesting and demanding the right to choose for themselves, be it about wearing a mask or not, or even being vaccinated or not. They say that they have the right to choose and that the state cannot force them to give up some of their freedom.

However, Woon (2020) states that "No one with a moral sense is ever truly free to do as he likes. One has always to be conscious about how one's behaviour impacts others". In Singapore, people recognise that personal freedom needs to be put on the back burner during a crisis like this pandemic. Wearing or not wearing a mask is a good example for this divide between Singaporean and Dutch views. In the Netherlands, some people are protesting against wearing masks, because it is not comfortable. They see it as a way for the government to censor them. In Singapore, people wear masks in order to protect other people around them.

Personally, I do not think that the Singaporean approach would work in the Netherlands,

because I do value the right to privacy, and I do not think that a government should be allowed to control what you do in your own home. But I do also believe that as a culture we could learn from the mindset of the Singaporean people. Instead of seeing these measurements as an attack on our personal freedom, we could see them as a way of showing respect to the people around us. Like Woon (2020) says, when wearing a mask, remember: "Do it not for yourself, but for your family, your friends, your neighbours and the legions of strangers who would thank you for doing the right thing to keep them safe".

These different points of view, one starting from personal freedom and the other from collective responsibility, give us two interesting perspectives. As global citizens, should we approach this pandemic and life after the pandemic from the perspective of personal freedom, or should we start out from the point of collective responsibility? When focussing on young people, you suddenly notice a focus on responsibility in the Netherlands. The older generations often accuse young people of not being responsible enough, whilst young people argue that they have to give up enough of their lives. I do not think that it is fair to expect young people to give up their freedom in order to protect the elderly the way they have been asked here in the Netherlands. In the past year, I have been to my university once. A lot of my friends have lost their jobs and are dealing with mental health problems due to isolation. Meanwhile the media talks about young people only wanting to party again.

I think there needs to be a balance between these two points of view. Yes, we need more responsibility, on a personal level but maybe even more on a governmental level. At the same time, this pandemic should not be used as an excuse for governments to infringe upon their citizens' rights. It is a tricky situation, and I am very curious to see how we will look back on this time in the future.

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Helen Nagelhout
Helen graduated with a Bachelor's degree in History Teaching and is currently a Master's student at the University of Humanistic Studies in Utrecht, where she is training to become a humanist chaplain. She has previously volunteered at the Speeltuinbende, where children with and without disabilities test playgrounds on their accessibility. She has been the President of the Christian Students Nijmegen as well as a delegate for the youth organisation AEGEE Nijmegen.
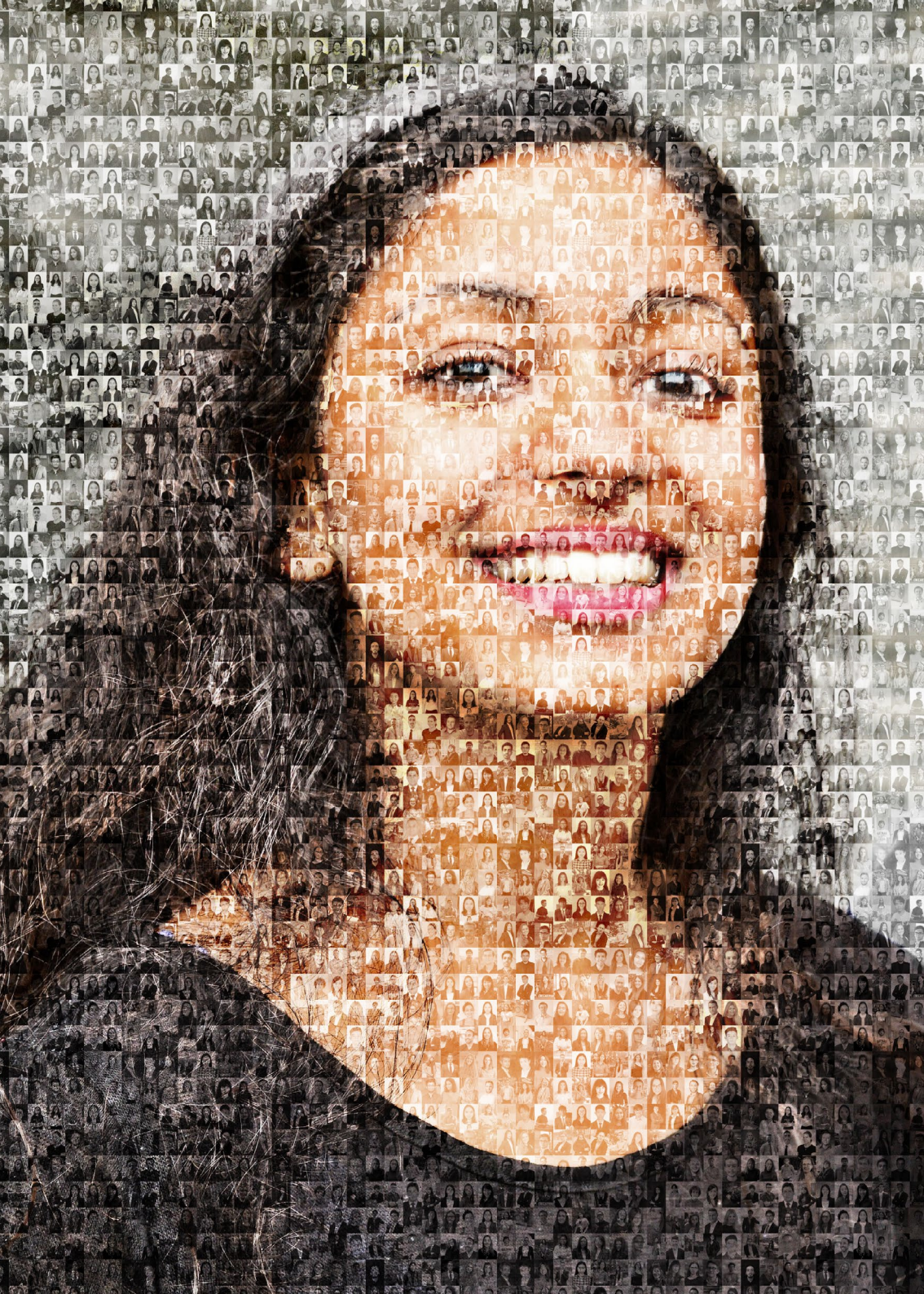
Pratibha Singh, New Zealand

A team of five million: solidarity and recognition

New Zealand's rhetoric of the 'team of five million' has seen the country safely through a global pandemic that has caused over two and a half million deaths (World Health Organisation, n.d.).

In March 2020, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced a four-level alert system as a way to manage and counter the risk of COVID-19. Already several preliminary lessons have emerged from Aotearoa's response, among which include the need for a unifying discourse, such as our 'Unite Against COVID-19' campaign, to ensure compliance with public health measures (Jamieson, 2020). Bringing the public together and developing a collective sense of responsibility and purpose was critical to the success of the governments 'go hard, go early' strategy to stamp out the virus (Jamieson, 2020).

Whilst Ardern's approach calling for shared responsibility has meant life on these islands is relatively 'normal', Auckland's recent stints into lockdown at alert level 3 have shown how easily a collective rhetoric can fall apart. In our latest community outbreak, Ardern's discourse pitched personal responsibility, opening room to blame those who had let the nation down (Manch, 2021). It demonstrated a shift away from the government's position that COVID-19 is the problem and people are the solution (Malpass, 2021). As in past Auckland lockdowns, an increased fear and a climate of blame inevitably tumbled to racism and stigma, as many in the team of five million pointed fingers at south Auckland's predominantly Pasifika and Māori community, perpetuating prejudiced assumptions (Maʻiaʻi, 2020).

Not surprising given the racist and colonial tones of New Zealand politics and media.

Despite south Auckland being the most vulnerable to COVID-19, as many managed isolation and quarantine hotels are located there, its community have also been the backbone of our pandemic response. South Aucklanders are at the frontlines, providing essential services and labour on behalf of the team of five million. During and prior to the August 2020 lockdown, Pasifika communities had the highest rates of testing positive for COVID-19 (Hopgood, 2020).

Around the world, those most vulnerable to the pandemic are the ones carrying us through it. Marginalised groups constitute a disproportionate number of essential workers (Tai et al., 2021) and a report by the Urban Institute concluded that in the United States, "Black, Native American, and Hispanic/Latinx workers are more likely than white workers to have jobs that place them at greater risk of exposure to and transmission of COVID-19" (Dubay et al., 2020, p.vii). Vulnerable groups also bear a disproportionate impact of the pandemic. The International Labour Organisation demonstrated in their study of young people in over 100 countries, a "systematic, deep and disproportionate" impact on youth, particularly those from lower-income countries, young women and younger youth (International Labour Organisation, 2020). Yet despite the evidence emerging around digital divides, exacerbated inequalities, and decline in mental well-being, young people are also stepping up to take responsibility (International Labour Organisation, 2020). According to the report, a quarter of youth have been involved in volunteer activity since the

beginning of the pandemic (International Labour Organisation, 2020).

The pandemic has demonstrated that a sense of collective responsibility is important to ensure compliance with public health measures. New Zealanders are certainly, and rightly, proud of the way our government has navigated the pandemic and grateful to live in a place where life comes close to resembling pre-pandemic times. But the rhetoric of collective responsibility should not erase difference, or the uneven experience of the pandemic on the global team of 7.7 billion. Collective responsibility without solidarity with vulnerable groups will always work to flatten inequities. And without an intergenerational lens for responding to and managing crises, our youth will experience long-lasting economic and health impacts.

Whilst we may all be in the same storm; we are certainly not in the same boat. In order to build forward fairer, our pandemic management needs to better reflect the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on certain groups.

Elena Curtis writes that in Aotearoa, we need a "tangible move to mana-enhancing, strengths-based, evidence-based, Treaty-compliant solutions...a new recipe when it comes to pandemic management within Aotearoa. One that finds appropriate substitutes for paternalism and racism and introduces Māori and Pacific-led solutions as the core ingredient." (Curtis, 2020, para 29, 31). Pandemic management and response across the world could do with more solidarity and recognition of those who are the most vulnerable to the pandemic and face systemic oppression, and those to whom we owe the most now, and in the future, for carrying us through this storm.

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Nora Berlin, Norway

Collective responsibility as a vaccine in the 'COVID-19 Infodemic'

False information about the pandemic has infected the internet and is threatening the safety of the global community. Social networks and mass media play a crucial role in disseminating information regarding health and safety, but what happens when you cannot trust the information you consume? The pandemic revealed the vulnerabilities in our interconnected social and economic activities, but also in terms of our digital bonds. The ever-evolving threats in cyberspace have put democracy, stability and even human life at risk when misinformation and disinformation are uploaded to our news feeds. It is only by spreading awareness, establishing trust and taking responsibility that we can endure the 'Infodemic', and the pandemic.

False information in the context of the pandemic has been spread by several actors for various reasons. Firstly, the fake cures, which are circulating on social media, like bleach and cocaine, causing thousands of deaths worldwide (Forster & Rizvi, 2020). Others lie about handwashing or calling the virus one big hoax. Additionally, some news stories were manufactured to create deceptive political disinformation campaigns to undermine democracies. These were spread by authoritarian state actors. Others promoted misleading information for their own financial gain or extremists' groups exploited the current situation to spread their message. What all the consequences have in common is how they impacted the ability of authorities to effectively deal with the pandemic and, furthermore, directly increased the spread of the virus. Fake news during the pandemic undoubtedly impacted public health, geopolitics, economy and political stability (EU Parliament, 2020).

It is important to regulate the supply side of information sharing, but this must be accompanied by building resilience among its users. The act of regulating the supply is a difficult terrain as it introduces concepts such as censorship and information bias. Therefore, we can not only rely on the big tech companies or national laws to protect the global community from international lies. Instead, we must put emphasis on the end-user's responsibility, the terrain of limiting freedom of speech should not have to be walked.

The youth, the most connected and tech-savvy demographic, play a critical part in the boundless information network which stretches across borders and oceans. To a great extent, the world's youth is the main stakeholder who shapes the internet by engaging with information, more than anyone. Never has it been easier to exercise the freedom to seek, receive and share information, but it comes with a condition: responsibility. We all have to understand how our information-behaviour influences others. We are all responsible for the information we share and engage with. Although, we are not responsible for the potential consequence of altering someone's perception in a good or bad way. We are, however, responsible for making sure our influence is only based on the truth. To build resilience against fake news, we have to put media literacy and source criticism in focus. If everyone exercises their collective responsibility to reject lies and misinformation by evaluating the information and cross-checking sources before sharing, the fake news will not spread. No one is safe before everyone takes responsibility for their information, and the youth should be the first movers.

Fake news is said to be the death of democracy and the end of truth, but there is a cure: responsibility. It is only by collective responsibility that everyone can be safe. We owe each other only the truth as global citizens, and the truth is, this is our only option.

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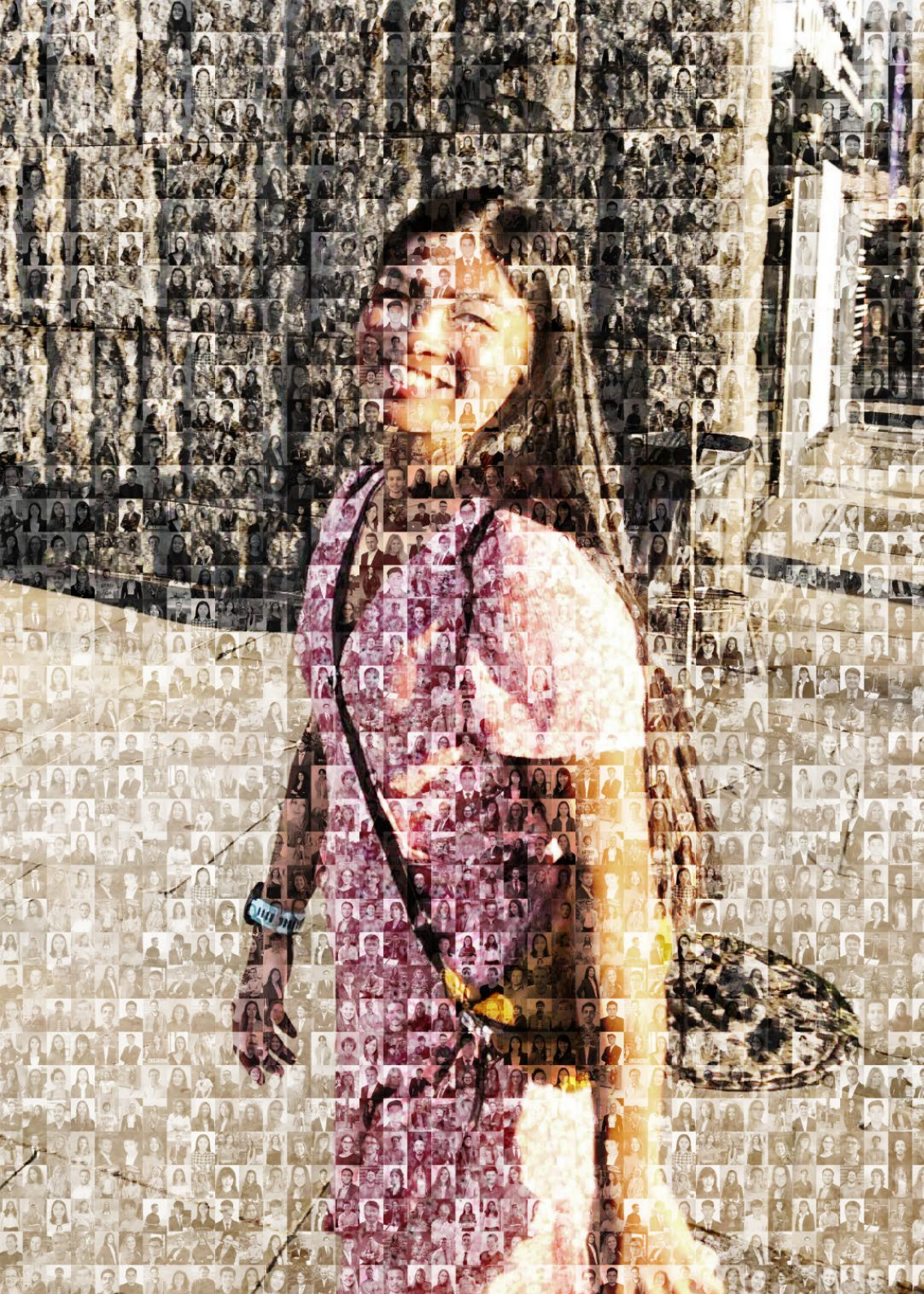
Olivia Hynne, Norway

When – if not now?
Who – if not us?

"Kdy – když ne ted? Kdo – když ne my?" which means 'When – if not now? Who, if not us?'. This thought was the very first that popped into my mind, a quotation from a Czech student back in 1989 during the Velvet revolution, when students took action and peacefully demonstrated for freedom. I think this quote is very relevant today as there is no better moment to repeat the question. We, being the youth, can make an impact and contribute to keep our societies healthy and safe during the pandemic.

We cannot wait for others to react. It is up to us now; it is in our hands to act. But how can I, as an individual, make any difference? How could such small actions seem to be meaningful? Nevertheless, everything you do has an impact. And it is not you alone who acts. You are a part of us, we, together. Because who, if not us, should start to take responsibility for our global community, to increase common understanding and to go along with the necessary restrictions which are required now?

We have come so far that we can agree with the saying: 'You do not know what you have, until you lose it'. COVID-19 has deprived us of certain opportunities that we have taken for granted before. We, as youth, have lost the opportunity to be physically at university, study together, go to work, travel, party, do sports and other leisure activities – basically, almost everything what young people experience in their youth. But we have not lost all. We still have other options, for example to put ourselves into action to affect others positively, to make a difference and to prevent the virus from spreading even further. We did not lose the freedom to seek further knowledge and to share it, and we did not lose the opportunity to care for each other.

Whilst we should all be entitled to the human rights that are embedded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, I also claim that we have corresponding obligations as global citizens.

For example, Article 29 states that "Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible" (FN-sambandet, 2020). By this we can relate to Immanuel Kant's deontological moral ethics. Humans have rights, but we are also in the exceptional possession of rationality, and rationality should help us act out of moral duties. His moral law says that we must act only if the maxims of our action can be held as a universal law which everyone can follow.

The most important ethical obligation youth have is to reduce our mobility and avoid socialising physically. According to the National Institute of Public Health in Norway (FHI, 2021), the number of reported COVID-19 positives in Norway is the highest in the age group of 20-29 years. Sadly, there are youth who do not stay obedient. Whilst I observe other countries having to deal with much bigger additional problems like deadly diseases, poverty and oppression, there is unfortunately a large number of young people in Norway who still avoid complying with the temporary COVID-19-rules and restrictions for the purpose of socialising and partying. This might be because Norway has been less affected by the pandemic and some people have not yet understood the seriousness of the ongoing crisis. Here as well, like in many other countries, some even claim that they do not need to wear face masks or use hand sanitiser.

At this point, individuals act selfishly without caring for their fellow men. We must think about what benefits society as a whole and not what is best for me as an individual. Sometimes there is a conflict between the individual and society because self-interests outweigh the common tasks in society. It is about the individual's rights that are put against the responsibility towards society. We must stop making all possible exceptions for ourselves. Choices cannot always be made according to your own desire and happiness. For instance, the impulse to party and socialise without proper distance must not defeat our inner voice which tells us to be obedient servants in fighting the pandemic.

All that being said, the vast majority of youth obey and do not take any risks. I have seen that one of the reasons how youth have contributed to keeping the society healthy and safe, is because we have followed, what anthropologists at the University of Oxford call the 'Universal moral rules'. By studying more than 60 different societies they found seven moral rules that are common worldwide (University of Oxford, 2019):

1. Help your family
2. Help your group
3. Return favours
4. Be brave
5. Defer to superiors
6. Divide resources fairly
7. Respect others' property

This is what we all owe to each other, not only as a national citizen but as a global citizen. Everyone needs to start with small steps, and it starts with you – from how you understand your own importance in your community and country to the wider world. When you understand that you are a citizen of the world which is not defined by borders or definite groups of people, you are on the right track. We are all united and must tackle the problem together. Youth's power is to create awareness of the given regulations and restrictions to stop the pandemic. To minimise mobility and travelling, keep social distancing and influence your family and friends to do the same, you will matter. It should be a simple task.

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Ans Khurram, Pakistan

There is no universal truth or single narrative

I feel that there are no universal truths out there and therefore I believe there cannot be a single narrative about any subject matter or sphere of life. If that was the case, we would no longer question dogmas and stop innovating. We have come a long way from being a world that believed the earth is flat. Although people are willing to adapt and adjust when it comes to knowledge, it seems, however, that things suddenly become a lot murkier when it comes to morals and ethics.

Ethics and moralities change slowly over the course of time. The Roman Empire was some nascent form of democracy before turning into a kingdom. Although humans have been on the planet for a long time, slavery ended just two centuries ago and is arguably still present in some form. We are yet to achieve true equity in this world, and there is no denying that privilege plays a huge role in how someone's life will turn out. Certain institutions train people to favour the collective over the individual, such as the army, but this comes at the cost of perhaps self-expression.

I have grown up with most democracies focusing on protecting the rights of the self and encouraging pursuing individual identities. But what happens when one person's self-determination begins to infringe on another person's rights? Oftentimes, I feel we tend to be selective when it comes to rights (especially those of groups) that suit our needs as sometimes the individual has to sacrifice for the collective. In some cases, the answers are obvious, and the government and law ensure that certain rights are inalienable, but other situations require a lot more nuance. Most people, me included, find it difficult to give up their liberties.

Consider this, the International Labour Organisation estimates that the disappearance of the informal economy due to COVID-19 has led to 50% of the world's labour force facing job losses (International Labour Organization, 2020). Economists at the University of Chicago estimate that only 37% of jobs in the USA can be done from home; and these in turn tend to be paid higher, as they account for 46% of the total pay (Travers, 2020). This situation is exacerbated in developing countries like Pakistan where over 8 out of 10 people cannot work from home and two thirds of the population is below the age of 30 (Hasan et al., 2021).

If one puts her/himself in the shoes of those out of work and those who cannot stay at home due to their economic situation, one does begin to empathise from where they are coming from. For someone worried about feeding their families and living on subsistence wages, the person simply cannot prioritise action items of social distancing that the more privileged feel are critical and urgent. Why would someone support an outright reduction in travel if their job is tied to tourism? To some perhaps, these new protocols seem to stamp down even further on them even as they struggle to simply survive.

How do we balance this delicate situation? I feel that the stakeholders do a poor job at communicating inclusivity and that we have failed to realise that social distancing measures tend to disproportionately affect certain segments of society. This is not to say that they are not important or should not be implemented, but we have taken a heavy-handed approach towards it.

We are living in a world where disparity seems to be growing each and every day with the 'haves' seeming to consolidate their position and the 'have nots' seeming to fall further behind. It seems that the stakeholders, especially the privileged, are not ready to sacrifice enough and expect more from the marginalised. The global village needs to acknowledge that not all citizens are on a level playing field and that collective action requires more from those that are more privileged and less from those that are not.

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Kathryn Patricia Reyes, Philippines

A tale of two cities

In late February 2020, the Comunidad de Madrid prolonged a debate over the closing of schools in response to the exigency of rising COVID-19 cases. It would take a week more of ambiguous instructions to clarify whether the confinement would extend to teachers, administrators, and assistants. At this point, the first case in the city was already confirmed in Montecarmelo, an upper-middle class neighbourhood directly linked by Metro Line 10 to the growing central business district in Madrid Norte, where a teacher returning from vacation tested positive. Outside the city, the suburb Torrejón was already a red zone. During the Easter holidays, the four major public hospitals were already over-capacity, the death toll was rising rapidly. Protests over the lack of urgency in hiring auxiliary medical support was higher than ever, and the Palacio del Hielo, an ice rink, was transformed into a temporary morgue.

Yet, it was not until April or May that the regional government imposed a fixed price (0,90 EUR) on standard masks, which up until that point could cost as high as 9 EUR. It was even later that they distributed free K-95 masks per resident: two masks for the stretch of the Phases 1 and 2. A number of supermarkets took the initiative of handing out disposable gloves to customers, in addition to hand sanitiser. The government was silent on this point and pharmacies conspicuously displayed "No masks, no gloves".

During this time, I was working as an Assistant ESL Teacher in a school near Montecarmelo. The months leading to the end of the school year, which we celebrated online, were punctuated with texts of the deaths of family members of colleagues and students, and the hospitalisation of parents. The Ministry of Education in Madrid

by now stopped communicating bilingually in English and Spanish, but they did insist that we stayed, or we would not get paid. Since I was remaining in the country for the next school year, I decided it would be impractical to go home, and so whilst living the crisis Madrid was facing, I watched the drama of my country from the screen of my computer.

United by a common heritage, Manila tells a similar story, even if it does not seem so at first. Whilst Madrid had a surcharge of information (and counter-information, generated by the elitist far-right supporting the populist Ayuso government), Manila was suspiciously silent. Later supporters of the populist Duterte administration, many from the middle and upper-middle class, would use the chaos to shut down the country's largest media conglomerate and its team of expert journalists on the premise of lease expiration (Buan, 2020). Then, pandemonium. Coming from a similar populist background, the lethargy in Madrid was contrasted by the speed in Manila: practically overnight schools went online, work from home became the norm, and Manila and its suburbs were locked in. The Duterte administration likewise developed a penchant for midnight press calls cursing everyone who questioned policy, the health sector included (Tomacruz, 2020). Significant in a country where socio-economic disparity is very high, the Interagency Task Force (IATF) for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases excluded the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) (Republic of the Philippines,2014).

What would result in Manila was essentially upper-class assent, ensconced in comfortable homes with stable internet connection, an

excess of disinfectant, toilet paper, and face masks and face shields for when they needed to leave their homes. A series of ongoing conferences by the Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines, in partnership with the Department of Science and Technology would label this as the 'individualisation of responsibility', lauding the class that could afford to protect themselves and ideally others, and stigmatising the class that could not afford to do so, or who would stubbornly walk out into the streets without a mask in search of any labour that would allow them to survive, thus taking away responsibility from the government and labelling the poor as the 'pig-headed working class' even as they could not take individual responsibility.

Back in Madrid, the old-moneyed elite, derogatorily labelled at present as 'Cayetanos' a reference to a preferred name of aristocrats, and primarily led by the far-right party Vox, famously staged a largely mask-free protest against the centre-left central government's measures in Plaza Colón, a strategic infectious location in Madrid that connects the old money neighbourhood of Barrio Salamanca with the tourist locations of Centro, the residential neighbourhoods beyond Malasaña, and the central business district leading to Avenida de America and Paseo de la Castellana. The Regional President, Isabel Ayuso justified permission for this protest as a necessity of democracy (González, 2020). Meanwhile, the same president ordered in September the confinement of neighbourhoods in the South of Madrid, historically and presently known as working class, immigrant neighbourhoods, as high-risk zones due to the way the live, or rather are forced to live (Hancock, 2020).

Both cases, in Madrid and in Manila are symptomatic of first class-level indifference. Madrid's call for the Dignidad del Sur (Dignity of the South) was a protest demanding recognition of the working-class people's own humanity, whilst Manila's Pagmamatigas ng ulo ng mahihirap (the pig-headedness of the poor) was an assertion of dehumanisation, in both cities, aggravated, very importantly, by how the government responds. Ironically, in Spain as in the Philippines, populism comes not from below, but from above – an educated, moneyed class. Secondly, both call into mind the debate of saving the economy, or saving lives, only in both contexts, where the privileged are allowed their comforts and the poor are dehumanised, which means what? Can we not say that in some classes, a minimum, informal economy is life? Lastly, neither show signs of expert consultation or study, but rather simple inner-circle, half-baked agreements.

As the citizens in front of the crisis, I am sure many of us have done our parts — donated to causes, actively worked in these causes, done the bare minimum of wearing a mask and maintaining social distancing, and disinfecting common places after use. But, and we have to realise that there is a but — in many places, there is only so much we could do and our responsibility, our job, in this critical time, is to demand fair and universal accountability from the people we have elected to do just that. Individual capacity and individual responsibility, even communal responsibility, does not efface the responsibility of our elected officials to answer to the roles they were elected for.

Madrid and Manila are not just the tale of two cities.

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Kathryn is currently pursuing a double degree in European Literary Cultures at the Universities of Strasbourg and Bologna and is writing her graduate thesis on the evolving values of young women based on the 19th century female Bildungsroman and their contemporary media adaptations. She graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in European Studies and a Master's Degree in Political Science from the Ateneo de Manila University. She previously worked in the Office of the President of the Philippines as a junior civil servant, as an assistant English teacher in public schools in Spain, and she recently interned for CIM Horyzonty, an association in Poland that seeks to reinforce multicultural and liberal community spirit and values.

Piotr Dzikowski, Poland

The values of global citizenship

In the eve of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the so-called Western Countries were more than sure of themselves that they were prepared for anything. Even more so, they were championed as the prime examples of how societies and governments should work all around the world. Unfortunately, this 'impeccable lie' as it can be called, intertwined with a piece of vanity, led to serious consequences once the COVID-19 pandemic went into the full swing.

Everything had begun very innocuously, when the first clusters of the virus appeared in Europe sometime in March 2020. Governmental response was languid, to say the least. Serious restrictions were imposed across the continent, and what was worse, in some states, stakeholders were shunting this threat aside, being sure that it would pass away in the upcoming weeks.

When we ask ourselves the question whether or not the individual takes over responsibilities for the common or even the global safety and security, the answer is most obviously: yes. Each single person can make a difference and contribute to the macro level. This is why we are calling ourselves 'global citizens' nowadays. Unfortunately, we must admit that many of the rules and values we attach to the concept of being a 'global citizen' have been neglected and forgotten, or at least minimised to an inexcusable degree. Especially in Europe we often overlook that our personal behaviour may affect others, not only in our vicinity but even outside of our borders. Reckless actions and the refusal of some people to follow simple obligations such as wearing masks, washing hands, and especially complying with social

distancing rules, accelerated one of the worst epidemics of this century.

This is especially astonishing as youth have always been in the spotlight as a fine example of the modern approach towards the idea of being citizens of the world. Young Europeans are often considered as one of the main drivers for the global understanding of our reality and responsibilities towards issues such as tackling climate change, combatting poverty, promoting equality or taking their fair share for the problems concerning safety of the global population. However, when the COVID-19 pandemic started wreaking havoc across the European continent, many young people seemed to have let go of all their effusive ideas. They failed to follow advice and governments' restrictions and limitations. Instead, a solid chunk of them were still turning a blind eye on the issue and went en-masse to 'Corona parties', met with vulnerable groups and even begun to exhibit visible doubts towards official scientific sources through their participation in anti-science movements and conspiracy theory groups.

We must admit that we are responsible as global citizens, and we need to demonstrate more genuine commitment rather than empty promises and ad hoc initiatives. After all, we are, as a humankind, one great network of shared tasks, weaknesses, and consequences. If one fails to stay amenable, we might experience a classic domino effect. If we want to be called global citizens, we must exhibit certain traits. Of course, government policies and actions come first when tackling such a serious issue like the pandemic. Yet arguably each single person's actions are equally important in

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order to be successful. In order to do so, we must face one stereotype: the future does not belong only to old-fashionably-assigned youth of certain Western states. We must overcome this idea and take the best experience of other, young professionals who are eager to show their effective solutions. But youth must be encouraged and feel that they are an essential part of our global community.

Asian youth displayed an exceptionally high level of discipline and responsibility during the pandemic. Along with the rest of the society, they adhered to the rules of social distancing, wore masks, and cared about the common wellbeing. These were remarkably simple tools, at the micro level, but they significantly affected safety. In Europe, when trust and confidence was lost in governments, young people started organising and promoting science, helping the vulnerable ones, and even spoke up about what needs to be done and where to put pressure on the stakeholders. In times of a raging pandemic across the world, we need more of these young leaders than ever before.

Piotr Dzikowski
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Dorota Smólska, Poland

To obey or not to obey, that is the question

"I miss pre-COVID-19 times". I find often myself saying this to myself, daydreaming about my past travels and adventures. Freedom is one of the values dearest to my heart, so I feel torn about the newest restrictions and uncertainty. My friends, family and I, we are all united in this sentiment of growing virus fatigue. We would all like to enjoy a hearty meal in a restaurant or a simple coffee with our loved ones.

But, as good citizens do, we also do not want to put others at risk. Thinking about passing the virus to someone is indeed a scary thought. Although a year has already passed, there seems to be little agreement about how the virus actually works, as it affects each person in a different way. The new mutations do not make the job any easier.

The dilemma or the trade-off between collective responsibility and individual freedom has been around for years, but the ongoing pandemic has really brought into focus the two camps. There are those extreme cases of people that had not left their house for a year, feeling overwhelmed and scared. And there are others, who did not change their lifestyle a slightest bit, partying every weekend and ignoring all restrictions. I always have been a proponent of finding the golden mean.

We can observe an evolution of views on collective versus individual responsibility. When the pandemic first started, we were all taken aback by it and there was a huge focus on collective responsibility. Governments were introducing restrictions, requesting people to stay at home. And rightly so, as this was a crucial time that would determine the future

evolution of the virus. Had we all stayed at home, would the virus simply have gone away? We will never know the answer to that question. But I believe in March 2020, we were all paralysed by fear and did the best we could to comply with the restrictions. Encouraged by the results of lockdowns and dropping numbers of cases, governments decided to ease the restrictions during the summer. The world seemed normal again. We were able to go to a restaurant, enjoy a coffee with friends, even go to a party. COVID-19 remained in the background, forgotten by many. In Poland, an infamous quote of our Prime Minister from July 2020 has travelled far: "The virus is in retreat" (Zdrowotna, 2020).

When I arrived in Belgium in early October for my traineeship at the European Commission, we did not even have to wear a mask. Bars were filled with people, streets were crowded. The first couple of weeks it felt like paradise. But I guess we all knew that this could not last long. And indeed, the Belgian government started slowly closing everything that brought a spark of hope and happiness in many people's lives following an increase in cases.

Introducing a curfew, limiting freedom of movement by introducing a travel-ban, and the contradicting restrictions changing on Christmas Day instilled in me a lack of trust in the government and a sentiment of crossing the boundaries between collective and individual freedom. And I know I am not alone. The truth is, the government, at least the Belgian one did not seem to have a well thought-through strategy to fight COVID-19, which undermined people's trust and willingness to co-operate. I can sympathise with restaurant and small business owners, who

lost both their purpose and income, devastated about their establishments being closed for months.

Every country seems to have a different approach, but there is one similarity: the trial-and-error method. All the while, hospitals were close to reaching full capacity. As I am writing these words, the Polish government announced yet another regional lockdown. With those changing rules, it is impossible to find peace and stability, and I doubt it is effective to open the malls for one month, then close, then open again. Indecisiveness and changing rules hurt both individuals and the collective.

Youth are a special case that suffer from the lack of social interaction. Most of us imagined the time in our twenties as starting college, hanging out with peers and living life to the fullest. But the expectations, as well as social conditioning, were sky high. Nobody wants to spend their college years at home most of the time. The feeling of missing out and the regret have caused mental health problems among many university students (Son et al., 2020). Nobody is going to give them a second chance at reliving this wonderful time. No wonder they are the first to rebel against the rules. Still feeling healthy, they organise clandestine parties, trying to find just a fraction of normality (Garratt, 2020). As the government focuses first and foremost on those with the biggest risk, such as elderly people, young people have the right to feel forgotten and isolated.

If we cannot change the way the government operates, we have to start from ourselves. I believe that in order to change the world, we have to change ourselves first. How? Let us pay attention to our mental state and wellbeing in these unprecedented times. It is impossible to help others, let alone the global community, if our cup is empty. Prioritising our health and wellbeing will have a positive effect on others as well. Let us do a daily check-in on ourselves: how am I feeling today? What can I do to feel better? What do I need right now? Let us share our experiences with others and engage in a conversation, it may help other people to open up. Only when we feel taken care of and we are doing the best we can in those circumstances, can we focus on other people. Leading by example is one of the most powerful things we can do during this time.

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João Pedro dos Santos Duarte, Portugal

Collaboration in an interconnected world

COVID-19 brought to the surface tremendous challenges at every level, and I do believe that sustainable development in a post-COVID-19 world starts and ends with one premise – collaboration, on a national and international level. The world is interconnected in so many ways that is impossible to ignore that collaboration should be a top priority on the political agendas. The health crisis made evident that without close international collaboration, countries and regions cannot develop themselves in a sustainable way and many people will be left behind.

Depending on the successful collaboration between organisations, being private, public, social, regional, national, or international, we can reach the ambitious goals proposed by Agenda2030.

The collaboration needs to be fostered at every level and starts on the individual level.

The health crisis brought by the pandemic just made it more evident that my actions, as an individual, will have an immediate direct consequence on other individuals elsewhere, and to the point that I can be a threat (even a lethal one) to others. And the same happens for others towards me. Therefore, we do owe each other, as global citizens, in every sense because our actions do not only affect our immediate surroundings anymore, neither do the actions on someone from the other side of the planet.

This has been true for decades, but the pandemic made it visible and tangible in real time. As an individual, youth or not, there are undoubtedly ethical obligations. I believe that our freedom goes until the freedom of

another person starts. With the COVID-19 virus spreading around us, our freedom can threaten the next person's freedom, and because of that if constitutes an ethical obligation to act upon it. Acting on it might be as simple as staying home, wearing a mask in public or respecting a government's contingency plan, even when this government's plan implies reducing our freedom (by confining us home).

But we can go further. We can participate in civil society organisations that fight the pandemic side effects, making our voice heard by the government or influencing businesses to get involved in mitigating the negative effects of this crisis. As an individual in society, our role is also to be aware of the importance of collaboration and practicing it in the simple daily tasks. For effective collaboration, there is one central aspect to it: communication. And in my personal perspective, communication has been where societies have been struggling the most.

I have witnessed a tremendous lack of communication from governments towards civil society, from individuals towards other individuals and this was generating a lack of trust. Misinformation also provided wrong guidelines to people on how to behave throughout this pandemic and how to act ethically. When there is lack of trust and wrong information circulating widely, people that feel left behind start looking for alternatives. Those alternatives often have the shape of extremism. I see this happening in many countries in Europe, including my own. Extremism corrodes and distorts even more collaboration and feeds the loop of lack of trust.

Europe and the world have tremendous

challenges ahead and I deeply believe that collaboration through transparent approaches is imperative. The youth might have a particular role here. My parent's generation's lives revolved around their local and regional community. 'Their world' was limited by the borders of their country and outside their country was another 'world'. Youth, like my generation the millennials, were born already into a globalised world. Some of my best friends live in other parts of the world and we identify as our own problems the problems around the world and not only the ones of our own country.

We are the first generation that has grown with world's sustainability concern in the background of our lives. This gives us tremendous power to reflect on the world's challenges and the collaboration that is needed to solve them, as well as the obligation to do so. Our ethical obligation starts with our individual actions but goes far beyond. We have the ability to talk, get to know and work on projects around the world with a few clicks on our computer. We have the ethical obligation to hear each other and foster collaboration because our safety is the safety of others and the world's safety is our safety.

We are at this point in history where we must collaborate. There is no other way. That is true for climate change, social inequalities and now, at a more evident level, global health. Collaboration demands interconnectedness and interconnectedness demands collaboration. That is the number one right and obligation, ethical or not, at this point. If this crisis taught us a lesson that we must learn for our own sake is that we are only as strong as the weakest member of the chain. This means that if we do not work together to improve the general state of things, this lack of concern and collaboration will hit back somewhere in the future, maybe with even more drastic consequences.

João Pedro dos Santos Duarte
João is the founder of Impulso, a social organisation that works to create opportunities for more than 600 entrepreneurs and small businesses to grow through collaboration. João's work has brought him to various youth entrepreneurship initiatives being selected as a Global Changemaker, Youth Ambassador for Portugal in One Young World and nominated Global Shaper by the World Economic Forum.

Valeriia Chernogorodova, Russian Federation

What makes us human beings

The COVID-19 pandemic has sparked a heated debate over our role as global citizens in addressing the wide range of problems caused by the spread of the virus. In particular, one of the most pressing issues is where to draw the line between individual rights on the one hand and collective safety and well-being on the other.

In response to various state-imposed restrictions, aimed to stop the spread of the virus, people across the globe joined demonstrations and other campaigns held against 'the violation of citizens' personal freedom by the governments. Many of those, who did not take to the streets, chose to ignore common health rules and recommendations, such as social distancing and wearing face masks, thus putting the lives of other people at risk. Moreover, some people started to criticise the government, medical staff and educational workers for not being able to properly address their needs amid the pandemic. I, however, believe that before making any step we should think about what impact it will have on people around us. There is no doubt that our fellow human beings deserve no less respect than our very own freedoms. Thus, the gap between individual rights and collective responsibility is not so wide if we approach our community as a group of humans whose rights are no less 'individual' and 'precious' than ours.

Firstly, when it comes to protecting people's lives hardly any measures or restrictions can be seen as extreme and excessive. Since the outbreak the global COVID-19 death toll has passed one million people. Many of the deaths could have been prevented if we had acted in a more responsible manner and prioritised collective interest over our comfort.

Secondly, in my opinion, our collective responsibility is to remember the vulnerable groups around us, because their individual rights can be violated more easily than ours. Scientific evidence shows that elderly people and people with pre-existing medical conditions (such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, lung disease, or cancer) appear to develop serious illnesses, such as COVID-19, more often than others, and they are at a higher risk to get severe symptoms (World Health Organisation, 2020a). Moreover, data suggests that infected people appear to be most infectious just before they develop symptoms early in their illness (World Health Organisation, 2020b). Thus, even if one feels absolutely healthy and does not see the need to wear a mask or follow the social distancing rules, it does not mean that he or she will not harm others.

Moreover, we can tolerate the restrictions more easily if we change our approach and consider them as a sign of respect for the individual rights of other members of our community. Let us take a look again at the example of face masks, which are often perceived as a state-imposed restriction on freedom. Those who visited Asian countries long before the pandemic could see many local people wearing face masks voluntarily for several reasons (cultural, ecological etc.). Back in those times no one perceived wearing a mask as something that bothers them. Thus, nothing prevents us from developing the same habit out of respect our community.

Finally, we as global citizens can and should take action to address the common problems our community face, thus easing the pressure on the medical and other social services. And

there is plenty of evidence that individuals do make an impact. For example, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic volunteer organisations and volunteers in the Russian Federation joined their efforts and launched a nationwide campaign 'We are together'. In particular, they organised special focal points in all major cities, towns and villages, where people could call or come for help. For example, those who were forced to stay at home (COVID-19-infected persons with mild symptoms, elderly people and people with pre-existing medical conditions) could order food, medicine, etc. and get them delivered by the volunteers. Moreover, as part of the campaign, volunteers with relevant academic and professional background helped in medical facilities and other social institutions, as well as provided free psychological assistance over the phone. According to the official data, since March 2020 almost 5 million people received help from the volunteers of the 'We are together' campaign. In my opinion this is a good illustration of how citizens, and youth in particular, can act and make change in the spheres in which the state may be not so quick to react.

In conclusion, I believe that our responsibility as global citizens is to prioritise collective safety and the well-being of others over our own interests. The ability to draw the line between 'our arm' and 'the other fellow's nose' – this is what makes us human beings.

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Olesya Dovgalyuk, Russian Federation

A pandemic diary

Mill's 'On Liberty' was among the first books which introduced me to the concept of individual freedom in the political philosophy discourse. Those days, a student at an English university – an intellectual environment permeated with the Western enlightenment traditions – I indulged in abstract debates about Rawls' distributive justice theory, juxtaposing it to Nozick's defence of minimal state, and trying to marry contradictory ideas to find a perfect social contract recipe. And the utilitarian appeal of Mill's 'harm principle' was general enough to find sympathy within me, a 20-year-old self-diagnosed intellectual.

Little did I know that five years later I would find myself on the opposite end of the continent, not only observing a very different society applying their own ideas of liberty when tackling a looming public threat; but that I would also be living through it. A foreigner in China, I was watching global media space become an arena for debates around those essential philosophical questions: where do individual rights end and shared sacrifice of freedoms to the societal wellbeing takes precedence?

By a combination of chance and gut feeling, I flew from Tokyo to Beijing on 26 January 2020 – to find myself locked in strict quarantine on campus for the following six months. From there, I watched the beginning of harsh isolation measures: between China and the world, among the Chinese provinces and cities, and between individual gated communities in Beijing. From day one, our accommodation receptionist would measure our temperature without failure twice a day. To enter any campus building, shop, or canteen, we needed to put our name, phone number and other personal information in a log

(replaced these days by 'healthkit' apps with 'health QR codes' required when visiting public places). Transparency, right? Just not the kind often talked about in the Western discourse: rather, an almost complete absence of personal privacy when doing such mundane things such as buying a loaf of bread. As elsewhere abroad waves of racism against the people of Asian descent (Stolton, 2020; BBC News, 2020) and those wearing masks sparked debates (The Straits Times,2020a), here, regardless of who you were, not wearing a mask was simply not an option. In contrast to the open ski resorts and entertainment parks in some European countries (Barker, 2020), any small outbreak (The Straits Times, 2020b) would mean harsh monitoring, mass-testing, and – for us on campus – an unspoken postponement of the speculated 'release' day.

Despite feeling claustrophobic whilst circling the campus like a caged animal, I will not deny I felt grateful for the security I was benefitting from. There was greater individual freedom in Europe, yet governments' inability to timely impose restrictions translated into dozens of returnees from Italy, Spain and elsewhere slipping into their home countries to further spread the infection. Watching my home country's government failing to enforce quarantine whilst suffering from major undersupply of PPE and hospital beds was thought-provoking, knowing that only 60 years ago the soviet government in Moscow effectively contained a grave smallpox outbreak in 44 days through strict isolation and mass vaccination (AiF, 2020).Today, the public does not even hide mistrust towards the Russian government: 60% of survey respondents did not believe the news about COVID-19 in March 2020 (Levada, 2020), and many choose not to

vaccinate today (The New York Times, 2020). Here in China mass mobilisation fed on shared solidarity and trust in the authority – despite it being the very same authority that turns against individuals who dare to point out its mistakes (South China Morning Post, 2020). Here it was, I thought: Mill's harm principle, with everyone chipping in and willingly surrendering freedoms, trusting that their neighbour is doing exactly the same. And doing so is impossible without trust in the authority and fellow countrymen.

Despite the safety, approaches like that of the Chinese government have their costs: they win by quantity, not quality, and thus are bound to have distortions and rigidities. The speed of mobilisation in China was impressive; on many levels, nonetheless, it was mechanical and depersonalised, which became growingly apparent as some policies ceased to make sense.

In March 2020 the new semester began, and more people started flowing in and out of our campus. Gardeners, teachers, administrators – all the personnel necessary to keep the university ecosystem running. They would bring with them food from the outside and even return with family members on weekends to enjoy the spring blossom in the former imperial gardens, whilst students, still unable to exit, had to report their temperature not two, but three times a day because of the exposure to more people. The harm principle was quickly losing its power to justify the rigidity: how could it, when the sacrifice was disproportionately increasing for one group in response to someone else's greater freedom of movement? And in desperate search for answers the best we could get were sympathetic looks from the administration, themselves incapable of changing our situation. The government, they said, is reluctant to ease restrictions for students due to our 'higher priority', and that we should wait for further announcements. Xinku, they would add a common Chinese phrase which translates into something between 'how exhausting', 'you must be tired' and 'thanks for your trouble'.

I left the campus in July 2020, upon my graduation, and shortly before students in Beijing universities were allowed to move more freely. Despite the challenges, both physical and mental, I consider myself among the privileged and lucky. As a young person, I have come to appreciate the unique contributions young people can make in these tough times. Below are two examples.

Over the past year, proactive individuals and enterprises have shown impressive entrepreneurial potential through their contributions to the global struggle. What they best illustrated, I think, is that everyone has resources to share and that, however small, any contribution counts. So, in March last year, together with several friends I started giving free Russian classes to our community. It was one of the most rewarding activities I engaged in during the lockdown, not only because I could share my knowledge with others, but also because it helped glue the community together, providing space for mutual support.

Another thing that young people can do is engage their critical thinking and network outreach to combat misinformation. I strongly believe that participatory activism is a human obligation in any progressive society. Therefore, whilst sympathetic for the good intentions behind keeping us under strict quarantine, I gave some interviews to the media outlets to shed light onto international students' situation in Chinese universities (The PIE News, 2020).

In the end, we should consider everything a learning experience. The pandemic has helped us unearth many undercurrent issues haunting our societies; it is up to the current young leaders to join efforts in tackling them.

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Katarína Blišáková, Slovakia

Youth as a key stakeholder to fight the pandemic

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic showed us how we all are inevitably interconnected and owe to each other. I strongly believe that the solution to the pandemic lays in our ability to coordinate the concerted efforts of various stakeholders, one of which is the youth.

The youth have moral and legal responsibilities in the process of making our society safe. The responsibilities of youth in different societies may vary due to their socio-economic and lifestyle differences. Hence, the youth's task should be based on their contextual reality as the policy of 'one-fits-all' (Todaro & Smith, 2015) hardly works in this scenario. As a citizen and resident of the Slovak Republic, I will raise some points how the youth can engage and make a difference to keep our society safe from the pandemic.

First, from my personal experience, the youth can play a key role in processing and communicating new information concerning the pandemic. One challenging part of any disease is when we know little or nothing about it. This was the case in the pandemic especially during the first lockdown phase in Europe. A lot of information and sometimes even contradictory information was disclosed on a daily basis from different sources. It was difficult to feel informed and make informed decisions. The curfew and lockdown rules were not exceptional. In Slovakia, for example, the government was frequently changing the curfews and the pattern was completely unpredictable. In this regard, at least in my society, the youth were more interconnected to each other and exposed to different media outlets including social media compared to other age groups. Hence, they could play a vital role in processing and updating

information in a more organised and informative manner to the people around them.

The second point is about taking responsibility. In Slovakia, the average family size is 2.5 per household (ArcGIS, 2019) which is high compared to many other European countries. Although the pandemic affects everyone, it is evident the elderly and people with pre-existing medical issues are critically at risk (Worldometer, 2021). Conversely, the youth are more connected outside than the people at risk. Hence, there is a high chance to infect people at risk with whom they live with, like their parents, unless we avoid recklessness, and take responsibilities for our daily actions.

Thirdly, volunteering can also be an area where youth can contribute to our society at this time. There are many civil society organisations we can join, and we can volunteer for. By doing so, we can get double the benefits. On the one hand, we are serving the community, and this can help us get immeasurable emotional and mental satisfaction. On the other hand, it will provide us experiences and social capital which will pave the way to the career we strive to join in the future.

Lastly, the youth play a role in the social structure of any system. We should monitor the unjust and corrupt behaviour of local and national authorities and fight against them through different means. In my society, one of the serious problems that affects the life of the people even at this critical time is corruption (Horbulák & Klierová, 2017; Nemec, 2018). Because of the pandemic, people lost jobs and securing even the daily livelihood became a great challenge. During this time, we all should

stand together, show humanity, help another and put aside our greediness. However, we notice the opposite. Some irresponsible officials are taking the pandemic as an opportunity for unjust personal gain. This has to be stopped and we, the youth, should put more pressure to get rid of the deeply institutionalised habit of corruption. We need more positive influence and commitment.

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Ana Udovic, Slovenia

Between resilience & adaptivity and a victim mentality

Like many other groups of people, the youth in Slovenia have been negatively affected by the pandemic. What is the pandemic teaching us about ourselves? Are we making the best out of the current situation or being impacted by a victim mentality? Are we acting responsibly and collectively? In the following, I would like to discuss the negative effect of engaging in the victim mentality based on personal observations in my social group. Whilst being aware of the detrimental consequences of this pandemic and its impact on the physical and mental health of youth, I also believe that we are often subject to a victim mentality, instead of being taught how to be more resilient, adaptive, and creative considering the current circumstances.

Youth in Slovenia are becoming impatient and tired of new COVID-19 safety measures being introduced. One year has passed since the schools and universities closed and moved classes online. Many young people had to move back home and live with their parents due to preventive closure of dormitories and suffered financial loss due to a decrease of demand for student work. These were undesired changes that surely had a negative effect on many individuals. And yet, Slovenia is among the countries with the highest percentage of youth that has access to digital devices for schoolwork (OECD, 2020). At the beginning of the pandemic, many non-profit, humanitarian, and public organisations stepped together to help those in need and, among other initiatives, started collecting electronic equipment to enable underprivileged individuals to follow along.

Many international organisations (e.g., United Nations, WHO) define youth as individuals between 15–24 years of age, whilst some other sources refer to individuals between 15-30 years of age. With youth I imply independent individuals, critical thinkers, who have the right to vote, obtain a driver's license, are legally responsible for their actions, among others. Despite this independence, I still believe that we are emotionally and cognitively dependent on our social group, this means people who surround us and contribute to our perception of the world (e.g., family, youth groups, teachers). Youth are especially more likely to use social media as the main source of news, which is the main origin of misinformation related to the pandemic (OECD, 2020). Many individuals are publicly expressing their dissatisfaction with the current situation, often without further research, and thereby contribute to the spreading of false information and influencing our perception of the present state. Over the past months consequently, there has also been an increase in young people refusing to wear masks, disrespect the measures and rules under the pretext of fighting for their human rights. But where does one's rights stop and the rights of another person being violated, start? That is a whole separate topic.

I ask myself: Could it be that by exercising such opinions we, the young generations, are being subject to the victim mentality? Are we being taught how to feel like a victim? Research on the victim mentality has proven that individuals who believe they are victims of something also tend to behave more selfishly (Kaufman, 2020). It has been claimed that we live in a culture that enhances the victimhood identity which in combination with "[...] feelings of entitlement result in a situation where social change struggles are more likely to take an aggressive, disparaging, and condescending

form" (Gabay et al., 2020). Some echoing events from the past year confirm the proposition that people who believe are wronged tend to behave more selfishly. Let us consider the following dilemma: we live in a time where technology is supposed to connect us more, increase our creativity and adaptiveness. Still, many blame the current measures for their inability to follow along with their studies and reported having issues focusing on their work from home due to the change of environment and constant distractions. It is not to be ignored that some really do not share the privilege of having privacy to enjoy their classes, but surely there are ways to at least eliminate distractions such as phones or the urge to 'quickly' check social media? This only calls for a further need to discuss the negative effects of technology on the overall well-being of youth post-COVID-19.

So, what role do youth play in this situation? The situation is difficult; however, I believe that each of us carries a part of the responsibility on how we are getting through it. I do not believe that following recommendations by governments and international organisations are violating human rights. It is the least that I, as a young, privileged person can do for society. I also believe that more individuals that share this opinion, which is evident in their resiliency, creativity, and adaptability to the current situation. Over the past year, I have noticed many creative projects being started among my peers. Some previously physical events held by students have been adapted for online execution. Groups of young people started initiatives to sew masks, help the elderly, or help younger children with school activities, whilst their parents must work (Mreza Mama, 2020). Some remarkable teachers encouraged their students to go out of their way and work together on a project, which united them despite the distance and resulted in creative ways of showing others that you care about them (e.g., high-school Project-of-Kindness). I believe individuals contributing in such ways are deserving of attention and applause. However, it does not take much to contribute positively to your environment.

For instance, you can positively contribute to online lectures by speaking up, sharing your ideas, and showing yourself to other classmates. Eliminate the things that might distract you from following the lecture. Offer your help to the student that is struggling at something. Encourage your classmates to have a study-call where you can either work in silence or share your ideas. Of course, such virtual gatherings will probably never replace the feeling of being next to someone, hugging and laughing in the same room. But there are ways you can positively contribute to an unpleasant situation. And remember that you will probably never be able to wake up 5 minutes before the lesson starts, wear your pyjamas, and spend this much time with your family!

In conclusion, youth in Slovenia have been negatively affected by the pandemic and will continue suffering in the time post-pandemic. And by no means am I generalising across youth as I understand there are many individuals unable to adapt to the current situation for multiple reasons (e.g., limited financial assets, loss of student job). However, we should not be further encouraged by our social groups to feel like a victim. And this does certainly not give us permission to behave selfishly and forget about the other groups of people suffering from this pandemic. We owe each other to act collectively and responsibly to keep our societies healthy and safe.

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Jorge Solozabal Zapata, Spain

Individualism is the new virus

The other day, a neighbour was evicted. She lived behind the house where she grew up alone as a youngster. The only place where she found refuge from her job, the one she lost at the beginning of last year. There, she raised three children and took care of her old grandparents. She always kept the doors open for everyone. Some fought for days to stop the eviction. They spent day and night before that door. But they did not make it. An ocean separates the house of this woman from where I am writing this piece, but I felt it so close. In this interwoven world "an injury to one is truly an injury to all" (Birtton-Purdy, 2020). Actions in a definite location are set to have consequences spanning over countless frontiers. In this vein, it is clear that responsibilities are also becoming global.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought forward many debates that will signify a turning point in how we understand contemporary societies. Indeed – you will forgive the repetition – this crisis has reminded us that we live in societies, as we are not just individuals isolated from each other. Responsibility, either individual or collective, has been a source of irresolvable moral jigsaws in the last months. However, in my opinion, this debate places the focus too heavily on the behaviour of individuals as we seem to have neglected the deep complexities of the situation. Following a thorough and honest analysis, one soon realises the greater responsibility of other (collective) actors, such as public institutions and corporations. The pandemic is teaching us important lessons in a gruesome way. Inequalities have deepened, and other historical struggles have reaffirmed their vital importance (e.g., universal access to healthcare). In this context, the debate around responsibility is just one among many others.

The youth are often in the centre of these discussions. In my personal experience, I have noticed how the narrative around it has shifted swiftly throughout the period of the pandemic. In the beginning, the world was horrified by how lightly youth were taking the situation, as gatherings kept happening and unreasonable excuses were made to justify doubtful behaviour. Nevertheless, as of the last few months, public opinion feels more compassionate for the youth. At the end of the day, many understand these times as crucial to everyone's personal development, therefore, it is a real shame that we need to be in full or partial isolation.

Besides this, though, I have had the sense of how deeply this debate has been 'individualised'. Each youngster has been blamed at some point for the actions she/he has taken. Some have pointed out their lack of collective responsibility. However, there have also been others that have defended their negligence in the name of individual freedom. In my view, the focus is misplaced. The youth, as almost every other collective in society, has failed at some point in the last thirteen months. But it would not make sense to address their mistakes with an individualistic approach, as we are not isolated creatures that live in different and lonely dimensions. By shifting our attention to the collective, new arguments arise, and the putative failed responsibility of the youth starts becoming meaningless.

Indeed, it has not been rare to witness initiatives by some governments that prompted specific collectives to behave irresponsibly. I was in England over the summer, when the government rolled out a campaign called 'Eat out to Help out', where they offered discounts to people

to eat in restaurants and bars. The economic success was unquestionable. However, it is worth noting that this was made at a point where the pandemic was not under control whatsoever. The youth was deeply manipulated during this campaign, as it is a collective that is prone to partake in this sort of activities more often than others. The result: a few weeks on, there was a terrible comeback in the number of cases as we entered the so-called 'Second Wave'. What is, then, a gathering organised by a group of friends, compared to a full-fledged policy prompting people to go out and spread the virus?

This is just one example that underscores the dangers of a narrative that aims towards individualisation. We should not be speaking of individual responsibility (or collective responsibility centred on individual actions) when we live in societies. By doing so, we see how public institutions and other collectives that I have not mentioned in this article (e.g., corporations) can very easily get away with their responsibilities, which are way more relevant and impactful than the ones of 'individuals'. It is important to also stop the spread of the new virus that is affecting us all, in every corner of the world: individualism.

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Ruth Vera Delgado, Spain

The balcony police

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was a time when human beings showed their true selves, and what they are truly made of.

Spain was, and still is, one of the countries with most confirmed COVID-19 cases (3.14 million) (Orus, 2021). Some people said that we did not really care that much about the situation to get to that point and number of cases; that we did not have any concern about society, and that we just followed an individual and not a group mindset. Are we here to analyse individualism and collectivism in society? Are we here to compare ourselves to others and criticise each other's behaviour? We can do better than that. We are here to support, to help, to improve and share. If it is true that we are living in a globalised world, our main goal should be to assist and fill in the gaps we can with the resources we have, and not to add fuel to the fire and brag about it.

Sometimes, people ask what the best way is to help others. Despite good intentions, we often forget our humanity along the way. We are all different, not just because of our races, cultures, religions, etc. We all have our own experiences and we come with different baggage. Two people from the same area, age, economic situation and religion might have completely different lives. You cannot judge a book by its cover.

During the lockdown in Spain, a new term emerged: the balcony police. After being forced to stay at home during months to keep us safe, only being able to go out for work, for grocery shopping, to the hospital or to walk the dog, some people started to get angry, frustrated and began to control and attack their neighbours. They shouted expletives from their windows, others threw objects, others checked the time

neighbours spent outside or just called the police to let them manage the situation. In some cases, people being shouted were medical staff, people with disabilities, etc. It did not matter.

In this scenario, we can ask ourselves the following: what were the reasons behind these actions? Did they try to be ethically correct or just follow the rules? Back in 1949, George Orwell published his novel 1984. He presented a dystopian world where citizens were encouraged to report suspicious people, regardless of being their own family members, with the aim of ensuring obedience to the government and maintaining social cohesion.

According to the Spanish psychotherapist María José Muñoz, there are four possible reasons behind the balcony police's actions, and they are mostly based on fears. The first reason is to find a culprit other than the government. Although people were not 100% convinced about the government's measures and results, because of their fear, they blame society for its lack of obedience. The second reason is that they lack the knowledge to find a way out of the situation. The third reason is envy or finding joy in another person's suffering. Being able to go outside for any reason, even if it is to work extra hours in a hospital, or just for having a job, that constituted a reason for envy, and a way of entertainment. And the fourth and final reason is to use a channel to express anger. Some people reached a point of mental suffering where they found that shouting and punishing neighbours was a way of de-stress.

After all these months, after all the new information and misinformation, after all the studies conducted, after all the suffering and

after all the farewells, can we make some good out of this? One positive change that emerged was that taboos about mental health are slowly breaking. The importance of well-being is not just about physical well-being. The lack of government support in this area and the struggles derived from all of this have surfaced. But how are Spanish youth coping with this? Spain is one of the European countries with the latest youth emancipation age (the European Union average age is 26.5 and the Spanish one is 29.5), the desire of not having children has increased from 16.8% up to 18%, 60% of youth believes they had learnt less compared with a normal academic year. A total of 32% were psychologically affected by the lockdown, with a bigger ratio for women than men (Gobierno De Espana, 2021).

At this point, we are used to hearing or saying these words: the youth, the future of tomorrow. But how are we supposed to be the future if the present looks so dark? How are we supposed to leave our parents' home without jobs and/or well-paid jobs? How are we supposed to study and prepare ourselves with a lack of mental health support from our system and a poor education system?

When we will finally come out of a big economic crisis, we might even end up in a bigger crisis. Youth have showed their strength, their resilience, and their empathy, but youth cannot be the future of tomorrow without support.
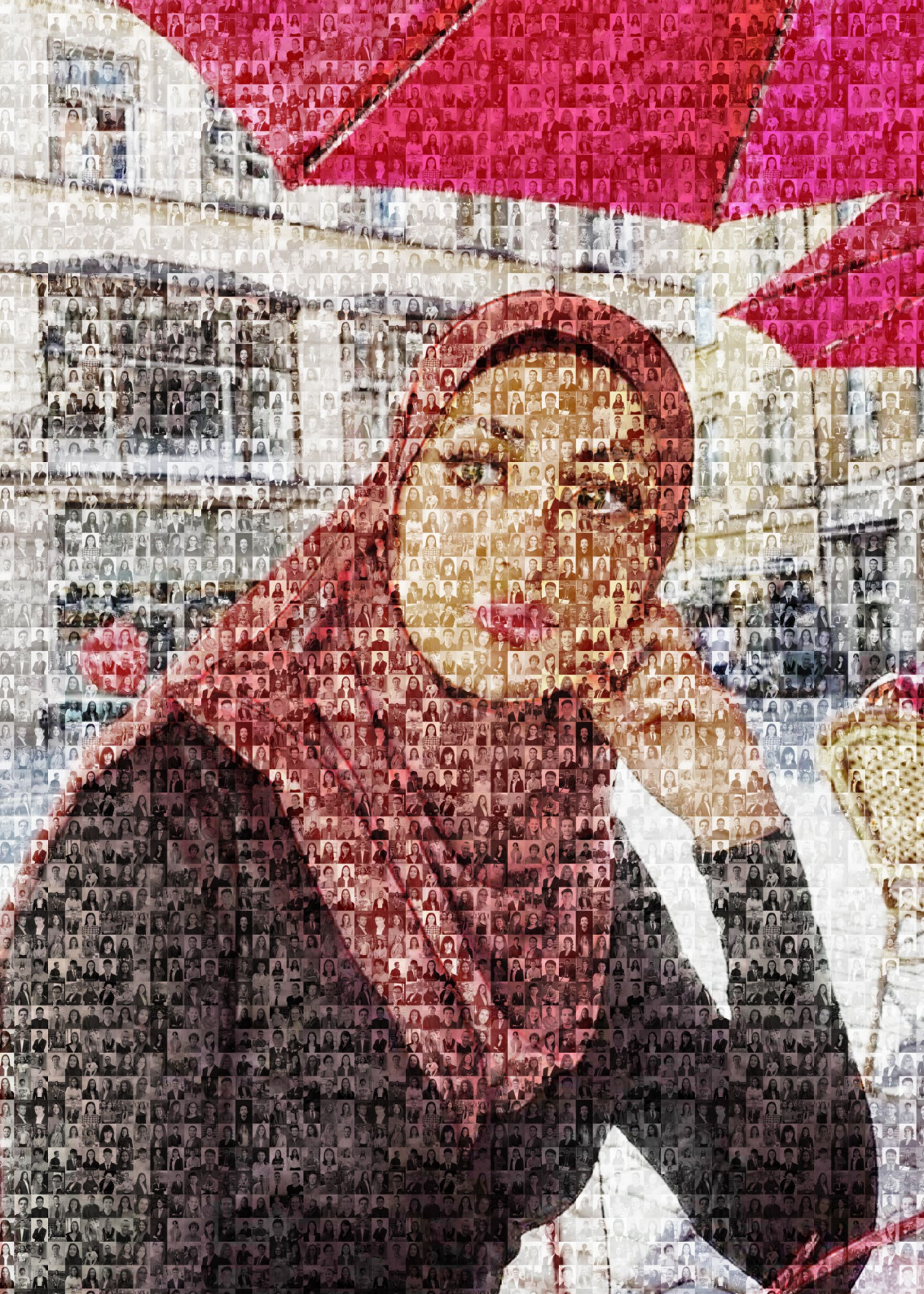
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Yosra Ali, Sweden

The effects of class differences

As a collective, I think we all have a responsibility to fulfil as the pandemic affects us all. However, we have to acknowledge the fact that not everyone is living under the same fair and equal conditions and circumstances. Unfortunately, the social and economic gap between the different classes became even more evident over the past year and we can clearly see a divide among societal groups, with polarisation on the rise. Although we like to say and believe that we all sit in the same boat, I have to strongly disagree. Some are sailing in luxurious yachts; others struggle to paddle a canoe. We may indeed all be affected by the pandemic, but we are most definitely not sitting in the same boat.

Already at the very beginning of the pandemic people lost their jobs, companies went out of business, and the unemployment rate rose dramatically. People started panicking, necessities such as food and toilet paper were hoarded, and lockdowns were introduced. Everyone was confused and scared, probably worrying about what might happen in the next few months. But whilst some were 'only' worried about the upcoming months, there were people who already feared their tomorrow. Not everyone was lucky enough to work from the comfort of their own home, others had no other choice than to continue working as normal and continuously exposed themself to danger – either because of the type of work they did, or because they simply could not afford to stay at home. This not only put them at a much higher risk of contracting the virus, but also increased their chances of having financial problems. They fell into debt and poverty. For example, statistics showed that lower-waged workers were less likely to receive a good level of sick pay (IER, 2020). This means that they faced a difficult situation where they

ended up losing in both scenarios. Either they had to go to work with COVID-19 symptoms, or they had to stay at home for a few weeks and ended up with barely any income. Considering that they had bills to pay, groceries to buy and maybe debt payments, they were forced get more loans in order to survive the financial crisis (Collinson, 2020).

Another impact the pandemic had, and unfortunately may even increase on the lower and middle class, is linked to the supply chain and availability of resources due to continued hoarding behaviour. When the whole hoarding scenario took place last year, many people were affected. Not everyone had the opportunity to hoard, and as mentioned earlier, some people were not financially stable and therefore had to shop in smaller amounts and more frequently rather than hoarding at once. This resulted in a catastrophic situation where people who could not get access to supplies on time often ended up with nothing. The elderly and others were also victims during this time, as they could not get out during rush hours and therefore only got a hold of the leftovers. Whilst it may not be as common to hoard as it was last year, unfair and unequal treatment is still hanging in the air. People with a better income and important contacts can influence their way into a faster and better healthcare, whilst others have to queue longer for help. There have been also recently several cases which exposed that wealthy families tried to get access to the COVID-19 vaccine faster, even before it has been released to the public (Lin, 2021).

Therefore, the big question is: what can we do as individuals to prevent the injustice among us, and how can we all contribute to our society

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as a collective? First of all, I think we need to begin with ourselves and ask the question: am I more worthy than any other human being? The obvious answer is no. And we should conclude that no one should get an advantage based on their social or economic stage in life. If we truly are in this together, then we need to show solidarity and respect to one another. As a healthy young person, I suggest that we take a stand and help the more vulnerable. Maybe one can assist elderly neighbours by doing grocery shopping for them? Or why not offer yourself to be a digital crisis counsellor? You could even donate money to various charities and organisations who actively work with issues regarding the pandemic crisis. I would even suggest making GoFundMe pages for the less fortunate people who are in financial difficulty. Or, if you are feeling really generous, volunteer for blood donations. We must not forget those who suffer from diseases apart from COVID-19, especially during times like these.

All of us need to act in order to make a change, because just like dominos, we might all eventually collapse if we do not stand together in fellowship. So, wear your facemask, check on the well-being of your neighbours, shop alone, distance yourself and be responsible, for the sake of your own health, and others. Because no one can change the world alone, but together, as a collective, we just might.

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Emanuel Aegerter, Switzerland

The strength of a people is measured by the well-being of its weakest members

Difficult times – such as the COVID-19 pandemic – demand not only urgent action but also orientation. People feel lost and leadership is needed more than ever before. In most countries – including Switzerland – the leadership role is taken by the executive power. Surprisingly, since the COVID-19 outbreak last year, the main measures have looked alike all around the world: social distancing and increased sanitary standards. However, the rigorousness in the respective application of the measures diverged widely due to different value-based conceptions of life, liberty and statehood. It was and still is a balancing act between the poles of 7-day-incidence and Zero Covid, between liberty and sanity, individualism and collectivism, between we and them.

Accepting the fact of pluralism may lead to a global consciousness. The youth are predestined to take the role of a global conscience. The mere fact that we are not alone in this world makes pluralism a human condition. Pluralism in turn demands for a public sphere. Communicability is key when it comes to the human as a social animal because communicating is one of its basic needs. This insight is led by the simple fact that the sociality of the human race has its roots in the third of the three concepts that look at human nature: 1) human species as a part of nature, 2) the human as an 'animal rationale' and an end in itself, and 3) the human as a global citizen who lives in communities. This philosophical approach is imperative in order to understand that humans are not autonomous. They need each other. And pluralism may explain – at least to a certain extent – why western democracies are struggling in crisis such as the pandemic. The public sphere is the space to discuss, criticise

and elaborate on political decisions and thoughts. As long as the fight against the virus demands executive orders which limit individual freedom there will be disagreement. Particularly, as long as there is the notion that the COVID-19 virus is not an enemy but rather a condition of biological life.

From a philosophical point of view such a notion fails to recognise that biological conditions are limiting freedom equally as COVID-19 restrictions do. And moreover, it misjudges that human strength lies in self-restriction. The virtue of self-restriction however can only be applied on 'human freedom'. Therefore, the absolute majority backs the COVID-19 related decisions of the Swiss Federal Council. So do the youth. It is the result of moral responsibility: Wearing a mask in public is an act of self-restriction in order to protect at-risk patients and elderly people.

Side effects of the pandemic management come to light in a Swiss Corona Stress study. Both the pandemic threat to physical health and the pandemic control measures constitute stressors that potentially affect mental health. A sharp increase in severe depressions have been registered. Moreover, those most affected by mental health problems are young people, those who have suffered financially during the pandemic and those from the French-speaking part of Switzerland which was hit hardest by the second pandemic wave (Swiss National COVID-19 Science Task Force, 2021).

The Swiss Federal Constitution, though, guarantees in Art. 10 para. 2 FC a right to psychological integrity. Furthermore, it stipulates extra rights for children and young people in Art. 11 FC and obliges authorities

to offer children and young people special protection of their integrity and encouragement of their development which is in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. To which extent such side effects of the sanitary measures are worth paying can only be assessed in retrospective when the long-term consequences will be evident.

Oxfam understands a global citizen as someone who is aware of and understands the wider world – and his/her place in it (Oxfam GB, n.d.). It is a responsible individual that acts out of duty and insight. However, a global citizen is not only concerned with him-/herself but also the broader world. Global consciousness is a holistic view that transcends the very own reality. Global citizens are concerned by the fate and destiny of others. It is the opposite of renationalisation. Vaccination is the way out of the crisis. And everyone wants to be first – forgetting the weakest.

The youth are affected by COVID-19 restrictions in regard to employment, education, mental well-being, rights and social activism. Nonetheless, we as the youth can advocate for a global consciousness and for the principle which is also anchored in the preamble of the Swiss Federal Constitution "that the strength of a people is measured by the well-being of its weakest members".

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Miranda Bilger, Switzerland

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in the context of COVID-19

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 1: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." (Charlesworth, 2008).

Nobody in 1948 thought that this article would be so applicable in 2020 due to a virus. At that time, the purpose of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was to ensure a common standard for all peoples and all nations to ensure a peaceful international community and prevent war between nations. Today, our biggest enemy is not another country, but a fast-spreading disease. I argue that only a balanced approach between individual rights and collective responsibility can lead to a sustainable and long-term solution, but it is often difficult to find a middle path.

Firstly, the term 'individual rights' has to be defined more clearly to avoid blurring the line between fundamental rights and individual preferences. This is vital to define adequate measures to prevent the spread of the virus without interfering human dignity: the fight against the virus is only successful in the long run if humans keep their basic rights such as the freedom of expression or the provision of education. In turn, the individual needs to adapt its use of these rights in order to conform to governmental restrictions. A creative and flexible use of the fundamental rights by the individuals is required to sustain the collective responsibility. Going to school was not possible for several months, but thanks to digital devices, online teaching could always be provided in Switzerland. Thus, digitalisation opens the space

for the enactment of fundamental rights and allows different individual approaches to deal with the challenges of the current health crisis.

Although Switzerland is privileged enough to provide all the digital comfort and left its people as much freedom as possible, the Swiss still struggled to accept that they must algin with governmental rules. Masks were a 'no go' for many Swiss and a doctor of my hometown became infamous by easily giving special medical permissions to persons to free them from the mask obligation. Moreover, Switzerland was in the headlines, because skiing areas were kept open for a long time although numbers were rising. In this sense, Switzerland can serve as an example for a population where individual preferences are mistakenly defined as fundamental rights.

Secondly, the different actors within the pandemic must be identified to ensure a comprehensive collective approach. Solidarity is not only needed between the single individuals but on multiple levels: besides the government or the community unit, also organisations are central to effectively fighting the virus. During the second wave in Switzerland, home office was, for a long time not mandatory and left open to a company's decision. Consequently, mobility did not decrease, but cases did. The industrial-organisational psychologist and lecturer Brandon Koh draws in this context an interesting line in relation to the concept of corporate social responsibility and its inherent focus on well-being instead of profit-making (Koh, 2020). Employers have the responsibility to create new company cultures which enable employees to follow all the restriction measures but still

perform well in their roles. Again, digital tools are important but also socialising opportunities and support of a work-life balance are key elements. Satisfaction with work is crucial for the individuals to endure this time of crisis and thus having enough willingness to contribute to the collective responsibility.

Thirdly, from the differentiation between the individual and collective approach grows the well-known dilemma between the desire for freedom (individual approach) and the need for security (collective responsibility). This dichotomy is characteristic of times of crisis and challenged governments already in the past (Dihn, 2001). It partly explains as well why the debate about the COVID-19 measures are heated in western liberal democracies as these societies tend to value freedom very highly. Indeed, in Switzerland many debates revolve around the legitimisation of the Federal Councils decisions. A right-wing politician even called the government a "Dictatorship" (Biswas & Neuhaus, 2021). Also, within the public, the dissatisfaction rose, as for example illustrated by the often-used Hashtag #SwissCovidFail.

However, what we need is not a polarised discussion about the dichotomy of security and freedom, but politicians who perceive them as reinforcing goods. In this sense, the solution is not a simple trade-off between security and freedom but a combination of both elements. Every individual plays an important role to sustain the balance. A collective approach is needed within national politics which transcend the party borders and aim to take every individual into account. The Swiss parliament has taken a major step into that direction by officially backing the decisions of the Federal Council by a majority vote for its COVID-19 legislation.

Finally, the discussion about the different approaches can also be applied on the international stage: on the one hand, there are individual nations with their specific pandemic situations and strategies. On the other hand, there is the international community with the common aim of ending the crisis as fast as possible. In this manner, every single nation has the responsibility to follow measures of the virus prevention and therefore, contribute to a global solution for the pandemic. International organisations, such as the WHO, play a vital role for the coordination of the strategies. Also, on this level, the collective and individual approach have to complement each other: Only if every nation takes the virus seriously, the virus can be diminished. In turn, the international collective must ensure that every nation has the adequate resources for virus prevention. Switzerland shows a good amount of collective responsibility internationally as part of COVAX and by its adaption of international development programmes to the new health challenges.

As the international community did by the UDHR after World War 2, it must now define the global principles to prevent future health crises. I conclude therefore with a call for a multileveled solidarity which aims for a collective responsibility without leaving the individuals fundamental rights behind. Let us act towards one another in a spirit of sister- and brotherhood!

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Voradon Lerdrat, Thailand

The need of a worldview filled with solidarity

"Freedom, freedom!" decried thousands of protesters, gathering in Madrid last August against the Spanish central government's requirement to use face masks (Mateo, 2020). This call highlighted the endless tensions between individual liberty and collective solidarity, along with questions on the nature of human independence. I argue that no one was born independent and such tension is delusive. True freedom is indeed conditional on a commonly built security and the well-being of all. Against the backdrop of this pandemic, responsibility to keep everyone safe and healthy must be fulfilled to realise our freedom (again). As global citizens, the youth are thus called to act considerately, promote awareness and empathy, and mobilise support for universal access to basic needs.

Despite various perspectives among different cultures, there is generally no 'me' existing in vacuum. In Southeast and East Asian philosophies, for example, the social world is the universe of interrelatedness. Everyone is in everyone else and can only be an actor-in-relation (Qin, 2016). Given that, harmonious relationships with and obligations to others are valued. These solidaristic values are also in line with the Islamic notion of "umma" (Halliday, 2022) and the African notion of "ubuntu" (Murithi, 2006) to name a few. Meanwhile, western individualistic political thoughts refer to the social contract and interdependence. Here, it is explained that the life of everyone – security, well-being, and happiness – depends on each other. In light of globalisation, moreover, we owe not only our nearby neighbours but all world citizens.

This solidaristic worldview can be adopted and achieved not at the expense of individual freedom, as the neoliberalists falsely claim. It is actually their "liberal utopianism," an ideology calling for the ultimate freedom of choice with less political or social control that obstructs real and equal freedom for all (Jacobin, 2020). To be illustrated, "freedom to breathe" without a mandatory face mask cannot be fulfilled by everyone during the pandemic. That of some also prohibits freedom to breathe as such, study, work, live, or even survive of all. According to Karl Marx, the realm of necessity is a prerequisite for the realm of freedom (Marx, 1993). How can one really enjoy the long-listed freedom, when not satisfying basic security and well-being? One is free to live only if his health is well protected and cared for, for example. Importantly, necessity of all cannot be fulfilled by, in Karl Polanyi's words, a dis-embedded free market (Block, 1944). Combined with the above-mentioned interrelatedness and interdependence, solidaristic political and social governance is therefore indispensable to realise freedom for all. A collective solidarity is not a blocking wall but a bridge that leads to true freedom.

The ongoing pandemic exhibits the human nature and importance of collective solidarity to an unprecedented extent. Unless everyone is safe, no one is safe and not all can enjoy freedom. Personally, despite my young age and good health condition, I am always at risk. I cannot study in class, hangout with my friends, visit my family, and travel as usual. Because the epidemic situation in my current countries of residence – the Netherlands, Poland, and currently Spain – has been continuously catastrophic.

To overcome this crisis, common responsibility to keep everyone safe and healthy must be taken seriously. Solidaristic governance with a proportionate limitation on some freedom is needed to deliver fundamental security and well-being, then bring back greater freedom for all. In this context, we, the youth as global citizens, should play an active role in at least three ways:

First, on a personal level, we should act with consideration. Despite our low risk to becoming seriously ill, we should always be careful that our own actions do not negatively affect others and the overall society. To put it differently, we should make a best effort in not imposing ourselves on others. We should strictly follow preventive measures, which means wearing a face mask, washing hands, and keeping physical distances. Besides, we should avoid activities that obstruct anyone to follow such measures, for instance, smoking and eating outside.

Second, the youth should help promote understanding, awareness, and empathy about the pandemic and its relevant problems. With advanced information and communication technology (ICT), misinformation should be redundant. It causes misunderstanding, false awareness, and a lack of empathy among the public. However, apart from the disease itself, misinformation also exacerbated racism, xenophobia, intergenerational conflicts, extremism, and Euroscepticism, among others. As a Chinese-descent Thai in the Netherlands, I experienced racist treatment from time to time during the early outbreak, for example. In general, the youth appear more digitally literate and open-minded than the elder population. Hence, we should actively communicate solidaristic values to others. This can contribute to a stronger public will and a more inclusive alliance against the actual problems – the COVID-19 pandemic.

Third, the youth should mobilise support for universal access to basic needs. The pandemic has witnessed more and more people losing such access, especially those living in countries with highly commodified welfares and weak social safety nets. Also, many poor states have insufficient potential to cope with this extraordinarily difficult time. The vaccination market is one case that shows their incapability to compete for access for their citizens. Again, everyone and every country depends on each other. To achieve security, well-being, and freedom, access to basic needs must be provided for the whole world population. Accordingly, the youth should promote this issue so that it will be prioritised on the political agenda, and pressure all governments to collaborate.

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Christopher Pike, United Kingdom

The duty of collective livelihood

The COVID-19 pandemic has served to challenge some of the most ingrained views among global society, as well as to bring to the forefront problems which were already lying beneath the surface. A globalised society which had been moving further and further towards a hegemonic neoliberal and individualistic approach to politics and economics has seen the impact of such an approach laid bare. The pandemic has been a horrendous experience for everyone, no matter where they are in the world; but there is much which we must learn from this experience, to make the world a better place as we build back. At the heart of this is a need to recognise our obligations to each other as global citizens.

COVID-19 is a strange disease, differing in many ways from other diseases which we already live with; it is these differences which has allowed it to wreak such havoc in ways which other viruses do not. At the core of this is its range of symptoms. Most viruses that we dealt with before either spread easily but caused only minor symptoms (such as the common cold), or else caused severe illness and death, which prevented its rapid spread. COVID-19 is unusual in that, for more than 90% of people who catch it, they will either be asymptomatic or else have only minor illness requiring little medical treatment (Ma et al., 2021). This allowed it to spread extremely easily through the population, as so many people either didn't realise they were ill or didn't feel ill enough to behave any differently.

The results are the ones we all know – lockdowns across the world as millions became seriously ill or died from COVID-19, overwhelmingly the elderly or those with severe pre-existing conditions. Almost every country on Earth faced some kind of lockdown; even the few which did not, still faced the huge economic impact of closures of tourism and transport. The economic impact in many countries will be greater than any time since the Great Recession. As the pandemic was just beginning in China, it was assumed by so many that developed and wealthier countries would be better prepared to deal with the pandemic than developing countries – this assumption was proven consistently wrong, with countries such as Viet Nam and China, as well as large swathes of Africa proving themselves victorious in the fight against the virus, whilst countries such as the UK and USA failed miserably and allowed the disease to run wild.

What caused this strange disparity, that the countries best placed financially to deal with such an emergency, ended up being those to handle it worst of all? There is a myriad of factors which made this the case, not least that wealthier countries have higher levels of intra- and international travel which allows the disease to spread easily. However, this does not explain why wealthier countries overwhelmingly took longer to introduce lockdowns; were too quick to loosen them as cases began to decrease; and were not always successful at enforcing lockdown (either through law enforcement or through societal and cultural pressures).

The cultural background to this phenomenon simply cannot be ignored. Whilst East and Southeast Asian countries, famous for their communitarian philosophy and appreciation of the importance of considering the needs of the whole community and not just individuals, took on great personal sacrifices in order to stop the virus in its tracks; individualistic European

countries, as well as the USA, failed in many cases to create a mass culture of looking after others. The responses we heard repeatedly – to masks, to lockdowns, to school closures, to working from home, the list goes on – all boiled down to one argument: 'Why should we restrict our lives like this, when only a small minority of people will be badly affected by the disease? Why cannot we just make those people stay home, and the rest of us will get on with our lives?'

This argument is flawed for logical reasons – if those people end up ill in large numbers, it will overwhelm the health service and make it difficult for it to continue and look after others with medical issues totally unrelated to COVID-19. However, far more important is its moral flaws – the idea that our responsibilities are purely to ourselves, our own family, and friends. It works on the basis that, for everyone we do not know (whether they live in our country or abroad), their wellbeing and livelihood is not our concern. As young people growing up in an increasingly globalised world, where the barriers which existed for our parents are being broken down by the development of technology, travel, and shared communication tools, we have a duty to challenge this backwards and outdated notion.

oung people, in spite of being the least likely group to suffer severely from COVID-19, have given up the most in the name of pandemic control – children losing a year of school-based education; recent university graduates facing the worst job market in living memory; all young people missing the opportunity to build those key friendships, connections, and experiences for facing adult life. No one will doubt the courage, resilience, and sacrifice of young people across the world in this trying time. But that duty we feel – to each other, all across the world, of all ages, even those we will never meet and never see – is so important to our collective livelihoods, that we must continue to prioritise it more than anything else.

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Global citizenship in the local context

In March 2020 my family flew from Heathrow, London to Narita, Tokyo to visit me for the first time in Japan. It was a new experience for them, and unfortunately not one we have been able to repeat. When my family boarded the plane a year ago, the COVID-19 pandemic had already arrived in Japan. The Japanese government ordered multiple public venues to close and for citizens to restrict travel around the country. We were already accustomed to hand sanitiser, covering our mouths and noses, socially distancing, the stock buying of rice. My parents bought hilariously misshapen masks from a hardware store in the UK before flying because, at that time, the UK was not a mask wearing society. Reflecting back, it seems like a dreamtime lull before the storm. Japan was tipped to be a 'disaster zone' for COVID-19. Instead, during the March whilst my family were here, the virus began to spread round Europe. Italy went into lockdown on 9th March, Spain on 14th, and France on 16th. On 23rd March, the UK also announced a lockdown. All non-essential travel was banned, and most businesses were forced to close. My family flew back to a very different Britain to the one they had left. A complete year later, though Tokyo remains in a state of emergency, the UK has had a much worse experience and remains in a stricter lockdown than at the start of the pandemic.

Watching the pandemic unfurl for my family and friends in Europe as opposed to my relatively unharmed experience in Japan has been eye opening. The pandemic is a global phenomenon, but location has taken a newfound importance. Previously I had prided myself on keeping up with international events across continents and being connected to friends in multiple time zones and hemispheres. I viewed myself very

much as a global citizen. In some ways, I was. Global citizenship is linked to ideas of global connectedness and mobility. However, even as we celebrate the connections, we are currently able to nurture through online platforms, I have never felt more disconnected from the UK and my family. The closure of the borders has physically limited my ability to see them, but it has been the contrasting styles of national debates about how best to handle the pandemic and the dissimilar levels of lockdown that have created a much stronger feeling of distance. What then does it mean to be a global citizen during a pandemic where location is such a key factor in the day-to-day experience?

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us wonderful displays of empathy and kindness. It has also shown us a tendency for communities to be insular, competitive and fearful of others. In the UK, systemic racist attitudes have meant COVID-19 has affected some communities more than others. Poorer families have also been disproportionally affected despite a rhetoric of 'all being in it together'. Internationally, insular thinking has also been evident. In Japan, finance Minister Taro Aso was criticised for declaring that it was the Japanese 'mindo', a controversial term referring to cultural mindset and standard of living, which resulted in low COVID-19 rates in Japan compared to other nations. Of course, successful responses to the pandemic are a reason to be proud, but global citizenship is about the shared human experience. Fundamental rights of all should be above any national law. Going forward, how this is achieved when considering vaccine roll out and future mobility continues to be debated. Though currently younger, healthy people in richer nations are still in line to get injections

before vulnerable people in poorer states, the pandemic will only be brought to an end if all are helped. As much as leaders may desire to protect their own nations first, this can only be achieved through cohesive global action. Global citizenship thinking is the only option. Acknowledging that well-being and success are ultimately interdependent has become the only way to move forward.

During this year, when your location in the world has resurfaced to hold huge importance, I have realised that defining oneself as 'international' or 'global' has much less to do with how easily you can flit through borders or hold down lives across multiple continents. Instead, being a global citizen is being able to hold space, empathy and care for all across the world. It involves recognising that it could very easily be that you were living their experience of COVID-19. Being a global citizen is being able to overcome the temptation to close into your

national identity when risks and troubles arise. For me, this year of being legally confined to one country has shown me just how unimportant my previous mobility was to my own identity. The often touted 'think global, act local' phrase instead continues to resonate; no one is safe until all are safe. Global citizens understand that events in their local neighbourhood are moulded by global events. The shared human experience will always be the context in which a global citizen navigates their life. Thinking back to last March, I realise that though in some ways everything is different, in some ways they remain very much the same. My local neighbourhood bustles on, Tokyo life continues, and the globalised social contracts in which I function still hold true. It is comforting to know that sometimes it is the very risk to your identity which helps reaffirm it.

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Isabelle holds a Bachelor's degree in Geography (International) from the University of Leeds and a Master's degree in International City Planning from University College London. Her previous employment includes working in Flood Risk Mapping for the UK Environment Agency and as a policy advisor at the UK Department for Transport. Since 2019 she has been living in Japan as a Daiwa Scholar, where she is focusing on how policy makers in Japan are tackling current environmental issues.

Trang Nguyen, Viet Nam

Between the joys of virtual connections and isolation anxiety

On 7 March 2020, Viet Nam officially confirmed the beginning of the first wave of the COVID-19 community transmissions. A 26-year-old woman who returned from Europe tested positive. Without a transparent health declaration upon arrival, she unwittingly infected many passengers on the same flight and kicked off a large-scale campaign by the authorities against community transmission that was both costly for the state and a population that was subsequently placed under long-term lockdown. 23,228 people were being isolated at home or in communal facilities across the country, an increase of 9,000 compared to the day before, whilst another 101 infection suspects were isolated in hospitals. Viet Nam shifted from a virus-free paradise to panic (Quan et al., 2021). The woman – called patient 17 – and her sister in Europe also tested positive with the virus, became the target of a massive online public shaming campaign, as their identities leaked across many social media platforms. They received a harsh punishment from the social community before being punished by the Vietnamese Government (Nguyen, 2020).

Media communication created both positive and negative impacts on public awareness and people's attention during the COVID-19 pandemic. On the one hand, individual efforts in supporting public awareness and protection against the virus were praised in social media. By contrast, individuals who did not demonstrate social responsibility received vivid, extreme reactions in social media. Patient 17 was a notable illustration.

Technology and innovation and the usage of communication devices significantly changed our lifestyles during the pandemic. This can be

seen in people's psychology prior and during the pandemic. Even before the pandemic, people spent a considerable amount of time on their smart phones and other devices. They seemed to enjoy the 'isolation' (or virtual relationship). However, when the country went into lockdown, people felt an 'isolation anxiety' and desired face to face communication more than ever. At the same time, we could see many innovations that emerged from this stage of 'isolation' in Viet Nam.

According to the Viet Nam Digital Advertising Market report by Adsota, there are currently 43.7 million smartphones users in Viet Nam. With a population of about 97.4 million people, this accounts for 44.9% (Adsota, 2019). Viet Nam will soon enter the top 15 markets with the highest number of smartphone users in the world. One of the innovations that emerged during the pandemic was the locally developed contact-tracing mobile application called BLUEZONE to identify and alert people who were in contact with COVID-19 cases. The application was welcomed by the people and many communication campaigns were run by schools, universities, public institutions and businesses to promote its usage. People trusted the app and did not consider it as a surveillance tool or as an invasion of personal privacy. The usage rather demonstrated the relationship between personal rights and social responsibility. It was a compromise: when people had to go out, they turned on Bluetooth so that the journey history and interaction information was recorded on Bluezone. Otherwise, the app was not active.

There is a saying that every person constitutes a cell of the society. A healthy society needs many healthy cells. If the cells are not for making a

contribution to maintaining and nourishing the society, how can society create a safe place to for the cells to grow?

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